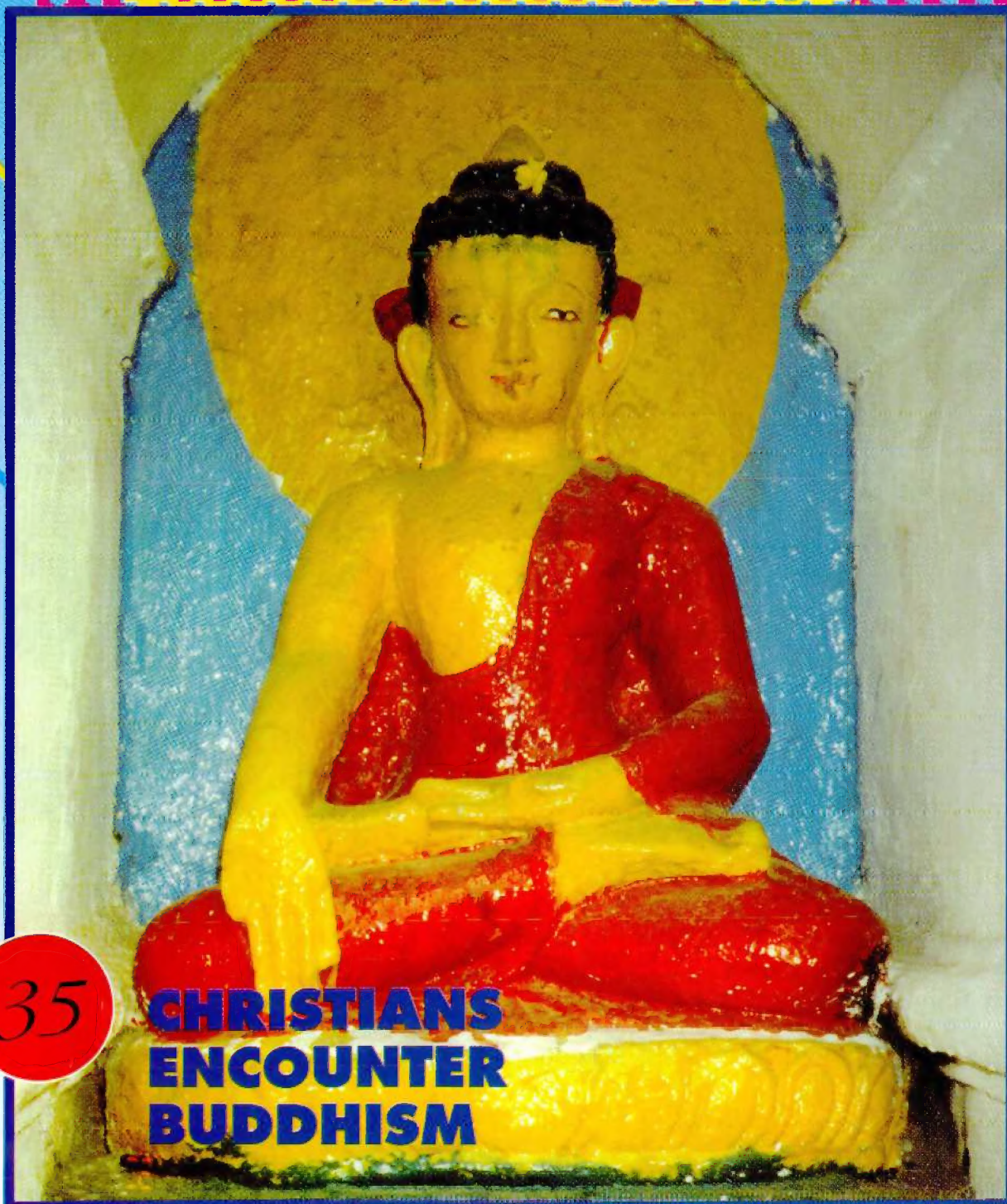


Lutheran World Federation

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Youth

m a g a z i n e



35

**CHRISTIANS
ENCOUNTER
BUDDHISM**

Department for Mission and Development

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from the editor

We are trying something new. Presumably you realized by the first glance that this issue of the LWF *YOUTH* magazine is a bit special. It is not that usual to have a Buddha on the cover of a Christian publication. Or maybe it is?

The point wasn't really the cover -- it is rather the content. This is actually a report from a study tour. You may recall that *YOUTH LETTER* No. 32 had the theme "Western Youth in the East." It introduced a volunteer program at that time run by the Dialogue Center International, the Danish Santal Mission and a number of other partner organizations. Last February we organized a study tour to look into the program and learn from it.

The reason for the LWF getting involved in this issue, was a very clear challenge from the Danish Santal Mission to assist our churches in getting questions related to young people seeking other religions onto the agenda. It is a complex issue, because we are being made aware of unmet social and spiritual needs in the Western part of the world, of churches -- or Christians, failing in their interpretation of the signs of the times -- of peoples' needs to belong without being tied. It also reveals how unprepared we are for living in multireligious societies and how illiterate we are when it comes to dialoguing with people of other faiths -- or no faith, in our own communities.

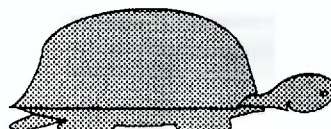
All these questions are addressed in the major part of this *YOUTH* magazine through articles written by the eleven participants during and after the two-week-long study tour to Thailand and Nepal. We wanted to make the results and impressions from the study tour available to a broad audience -- and thereby hopefully spark some discussion and reflection.

None of the participants were experts on Buddhism, Hinduism, meditation or dialogue. But they all gained knowledge and insights through cultural, religious and very personal meetings -- and this is what we want to share with you. It is our hope that despite the fact that the group consisted of fourteen participants and resource persons from the so-called West (USA, Canada, Australia, Germany, France, Slovakia, Hungary, Denmark, Finland, Sweden and Norway) -- this material can be of global interest. Some of the questions raised are quite universal.

If you'd like to dig deeper into the issue and get some visual impressions, you might be helped by the video "Ex Oriente Lux" from the study tour. It is produced by the Hungarian participant, Tamas Fabiny, is in VHS, English, and will soon be available from our office.

Siv Limstrand

Editorial Staff: Birgitta Voltenauer, Janet Bond-Nash



The opinions expressed in this magazine reflect the views of the authors and not necessarily those of the Lutheran World Federation.

letters to editor

Thank you for the new edition of the Youth magazine. It definitely looks much better! -- and in this day and age appearance is what counts! I appreciate receiving news from your network -- some of which I do not get in other places. As someone who works in an ecumenical place, it was good to see the prominence given to EGGYS. A number of people are going from here.

*Gillian Southey
Christian World Service, New Zealand*

It was a pleasure to receive the latest Youth magazine. I extend my appreciation to the DMD youth desk for working tirelessly to produce it. The Youth magazine keeps me abreast of a variety of events, mostly undertaken by other Lutheran youth, ecumenical youth and student organizations. Whenever I read the magazine, I feel challenged to try and take broader steps towards testifying the love of Christ Jesus to youth in other walks of life.

K. Makado, Zimbabwe

I was interested in the Youth magazine of April 1993, especially the News in Brief column i.e. the way South African Lutheran youth are getting to know each other and are strongly accepting each other, even busying themselves with reaching out to make their parents and communities accept that there are differences before God -- God bless you, South African Lutheran youth. I would also like to wish all Lutheran youth of this world well. I will keep helping through prayer and practical participation as I have already been doing. Thank you very much Lutheran youth, all supporting groups, organizers and advisors of all the structures.

John Gatsi, Zimbabwe

We do also accept constructive critical letters! - The Editor



peace - salaam - shalom

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) hailed the signing of the Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement as a "historic breakthrough." We bring excerpts of the statement made by the LWF general secretary, Gunnar Staalsett:

"I am very excited about the historic breakthrough in the Middle East peace process. It was a tremendous act of personal and political courage of the Israeli government and PLO leadership. Both parties have taken steps which show great statesmanship. Everyone knows that this is only the first step in a long and arduous process in which democratic consensus-building is needed in order to achieve a lasting peace with justice for both Israelis and Palestinians. A culture of violence developed through generations of hostility needs to be converted into a culture of reconciliation and democracy.

"The role of the Lutheran World Federation on the arduous way towards peace has not been insignificant and we wish to continue this mission in cooperation with our Palestinian member church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan, and in open dialogue with the PLO and the Israeli authorities. "The prayers of Jews, Muslims and Christians for peace between Israel and the Palestinians have not been in vain. Nor has the suffering of those who have committed their lives to peace and reconciliation in the region. (LWI)

study tour

a buddhist missionary

jutta weinkouff, denmark



As she sits on her pillow on the floor, a little bit higher than we are seated, she is a wonderful sight.

She carries her wine-red costume of order with dignity and emanates self-confidence and authority.

Robina from Australia has accepted to meet sixteen persons of another faith.

For a few hours she outlines the main aspects of her own religion and tells about why she is a Buddhist nun today.

shocked parents

Robina grew up in a Catholic home and went to a convent school. She loved the school and the daily rhythm, where you started with mass every morning, and she was fascinated by the sisters who taught. When she was fourteen years old she told her parents that she wanted to become a nun herself. They were shocked: Robina should get rid of these whims and see to it that she found a nice and stable husband.

Robina did not like her parent's reaction; if she could not become a nun she would prefer to study and live an independent life. But her parent's rejection of her wish to become a nun upset something inside Robina. The older she got, the more questions she had on her mind. When she tried to get answers in her congregation or from the priest, she was often met with scepticism and distrust and finally she felt pushed out -- there was no place for doubts or critical questions. (In my own mind I was first relieved; Robina was a Catholic and the Catholic Church is surely not like our Lutheran one. But then an unmistakable Danish voice sounded in my head: "On your knees for the Bible, professors!" I wonder how Robina would have made it in the Folk Church?)

yoga and meditation

Robina went to university at the end of the 1960s. There she found those who shared her opinions, who also questioned authorities and the eternal truths and who wished to find the answers themselves. It was a period when many tried hallucinating drugs, yoga and meditation. And when the Beatles traveled to India and found a *guru*.

Robina also searched, but only when she became acquainted with Kung Fu, an old Chinese art of fighting, did she find something which she felt was right. But even though she loved the work of concentration and control over body and mind, something was always missing -- the religious longings kept surfacing.

reincarnation

For Robina the revelation came in the middle of the 1970s when some friends invited her to a one-week meditation course with two lamas of Tibetan Buddhism. The lamas were the first ones to realize how much Tibetan Buddhism could give to frustrated Westerners hungry for truth, and during the course, with meditations and religious rites, Robina felt as if she had arrived at her spiritual home. She became convinced that she had met the lamas before and suddenly realized that the idea of reincarnation could explain many of the questions on her mind. She also realized that what had put a check on her spiritual development was a bad *karma* from her former life and in Tibetan Buddhism there are techniques which could remove this bad *karma*. She started purposeful Buddhist practice which soon led her to travel to India and Nepal to live in the monasteries of exiled Tibetans for longer periods of time and keep up her spiritual exercises. Finally she decided to go the whole way and become ordained. Since then she has been a Buddhist missionary.

Now Robina is traveling in Australia and the United States of America, conducting courses and retreats for Western youth. She is also often asked to lead courses in Western-oriented monasteries in Nepal and India where there are monthly meditation courses for rucksack travelers.

recognition

Robina is smart. Talking and gesticulating. Bright and systematic. I don't doubt that she is a good missionary! She knows about the frustrations and (unanswered) questions of many young people in the West. And she argues her views convincingly.

But suddenly she lets her hands drop and looks straight at us and asks: "You as Christians -- where do you think I went wrong? Do you think I will end up in hell because of this?" A moment of breathless silence.... Robina bursts into laughter -- no one should doubt that she is only provoking. I feel a strong urge to hug her and talk about God's eternal love and grace, being a child of God, a following of Christ which is based in love and not in fear of punishment, bad *karma* and reincarnation -- but the moment is lost. Robina continues with high speed and once more is in control of the situation.

We have spent an exciting and instructive day together. We part with a hug. We recognized something in each other.

What would have happened to Robina at home?

Not many of us talk when we leave. I think we're all questioning what would have happened to Robina in our churches at home. Anyhow, most of us have similar experiences with questions, and subjects not considered good manners within the religious flock. I wonder why? Shouldn't the church participate in the debate concerning all aspects of human life and commend themselves so much to God that a challenge from searching people can become a mutual growth -- and not fear or uncertainty?

I'm dreaming of "adult Christians" in the congregations. Christians who will take searching people by the hand and walk with them part of the way, not so much in theoretical discussions but rather like the request in Grundtvig's church: "Read what is written but witness about how you have lived." I hope I am ready the day I meet a Robina at home -- and that I dare move when questions are asked.

This article appeared in "Dansk Mission" 2/93

why is buddhism so attractive to people in the western world?

gerd nestler, germany



Western monks drinking afternoon tea with the abbot in Wat Pah Nanachat.

"Man is gifted with reason; he is life being aware of itself; he has awareness of himself, of his fellow man, of his past, and of the possibilities of his future.... The awareness of his aloneness and separateness, of his helplessness before the forces of nature and of society, all this makes his separate, disunited existence an unbearable prison.... Man -- of all ages and cultures -- is confronted with the solution of one and the same question: the question of how to overcome separateness, how to achieve union, how to transcend one's own individual life and find atonement. The answer varies. But the more the human race emerges from these primary bonds, the more it separates itself from the natural world, the more intense becomes the need to find new ways of escaping separateness.... Alcoholism, and drug addiction are the forms which the individual chooses in a non-organistic culture.... While they try to escape from separateness by taking refuge in alcohol or drugs, they feel all the more separate after the organistic experience is over, and thus are driven to take re-

course to it with increasing frequency and intensity."¹ The longing for a different and better method causing no feelings of shame can be appeased by meditation and asceticism.

Another problem of our Western world is the frightening measure of conformity. "One can only understand the power of the fear to be different...if one understands the depths of the need not to be separated. Sometimes the fear of non-conformity is rationalized as fear of the practical dangers which could threaten the non-conformist. But actually, people want to conform to a much higher degree than they are forced to conform, at least in the Western democracies.... The advertising slogan of "it is different" shows up this pathetic need for difference, when in reality there is hardly any of it left."²

To me, as someone whose country has developed from socialism to a free market economy, this tendency is

particularly evident. Advertising insinuates that the value of a human being depends on what he or she possesses or consumes. People from the Western world who are painfully conscious of this lack of individuality are looking for more individuality or their own identity in Buddhism.

In the following I would like to try to present my own experiences and insights. The reasons why people study the teachings of Buddhism are as manifold as the number of people who are interested in Buddhism. During my two-week visit I was not completely able to understand why people find Buddhism so attractive, and in spite of its intensity my visit did not allow me to get a complete picture of Buddhism in such a short time.

In order to clarify the situation a little, I would like to differentiate between three categories of interested people without wanting to compartmentalize.

The first category are well-off tourists, usually with a higher education. They are open to any adventure and any new experience. The superficial way of getting to know Buddhism is often nothing but an exclusive travel experience, and any more intensive occupation with Buddhist teaching is rather unlikely. But as a very clear and well-thought-out philosophical system, in which self-realization plays a large role, it has a strong attraction for these bourgeois intellectuals. They also are looking for more individuality in a life that otherwise runs its course in a cybernetic way.

A second category are those people who are consciously looking for a spiritual path. Disappointed by our Western churches with their dogmas, the frequently encountered coldness and distance from life, as well as the indifference toward outsiders and people who think differently, they are looking for the salvation of their souls. It was, however, typical of these people that although they came from Christian families they had never found access to the message of Jesus Christ. Their spiritual uprooting was due to the fact that they only saw the off-putting picture of a hierarchical church that represents the materialistically minded middle class. To them Buddhism as a developed system of humanism seems to be the way out, the way to salvation. Particularly in Mahayana Buddhism, compassion and love of one's neighbor play an important role. Buddhist ethics are in the service of "self-salvation," and to these people they are a genuine alternative to the salvation concept of Christianity. A Canadian whom I met in a monastery in Thailand said it like this: "In Christianity and in Western society generally, we are only led by the nose. That's why all suffering comes from there. Here in Buddhism there is wisdom, here you are your own boss!"

When these "spiritual refugees" get in touch with Buddhist teaching, they experience stillness for the first time. They try meditation and find that it works. (In any case, meditation seems to be the most probable

start to a "career as a Buddhist"). A young Australian said that his experiences during a twenty-nine-day meditation course caused him to become a Buddhist. The almost exclusive occupation with oneself is very attractive to these people. They are enthusiastic to have found such a logically constructed and humanistic teaching as their way. Illumination and later on salvation (achieving of *nirvana*) are attainable through one's own efforts, alternative to the salvation concept of Christianity. The life of a Buddhist means constant life in the teaching of Buddha. Their spiritual life takes place all the time, not only on Sundays as in Western society. The Australian mentioned above said the teaching of Buddha was very clear, the life of a Buddhist was holistic and thus in complete contrast to Christianity. He came from a Catholic family but had never been able to find a personal relationship to the gospel.

Sometimes Buddhism with its asceticism and its fundamental otherness from the Western world is only a new attempt to lead an extreme way of life. I talked to people who after the "hippie" movement of the 1960s or the anarchist movement of the 1970s had become Buddhist monks and eagerly followed the strict rules of monasticism. These people, who tried to flee from their families, their social environments, sometimes from reality altogether, I put into the third category. They often arrived as complete dropouts, for instance in Thailand. They tried to find answers to their unsolved questions by indulging in wild sexuality or drugs, until, after having failed they came into touch with Buddhism. After a meditation course, that with its physical strains makes a change of consciousness easier, they are soon ready to leave their former life behind them and join the Sangha, the Buddhist monks' order.

They begin a new life in a completely different world. That is already visible in outward things such as the typical monk's habit or the shorn heads. There are no indissoluble ties to the order as perhaps are the vows in Christian orders, but a return to the old world and former life is very rare. On the other hand, monks who have lived for a certain time in the Sangha, travel to Western countries in order to spread Buddhist teaching among the many interested people there. Usually only people belonging to the second or the third category are found in the West.

The problems of our Western world with its increasing conformity, its leveling out at any price, also manifest themselves in the rapidly growing number of meditation centers in the West. As long as there is the tendency to eliminate all differences in Western industrial societies, as long as it is not the human being, but only his performance that counts, as long as the church offers no real possibility of accompaniment in life, of a holistic life style and of a new discovery of Christian ethical values, the attraction of Far Eastern religions such as Buddhism will remain strong.

study tour

The psychological, the intellectual side of Buddhism is becoming a sort of popular religion in the West. ("New Age" plays a role here as well.) Self-criticism is also required. We as Christians, particularly in the Western industrial countries, are asked what changes we can and want to bring about. We have to find ways of preventing a spiritual uprooting, especially in young people. It is important to have a living congregation of Christians in our churches that has something to set against the world of materialism and consumerism. It will be necessary to talk to representatives of Buddhism, as already happens, and to make clear to people in the West what Buddhism really is. If after that they still want to become Buddhists we can do nothing about it. Nor, despite all necessary scepticism, should we condemn everything that Buddhism has to offer in the way of positive influences. Perhaps Christian meditation is the way to more intensive self-reflection on our relationship with God. For me as a Christian it was a most interesting experience to examine Buddhism and its influence on the West more closely. Knowing it better has strengthened my faith without leading me to reject what is interesting in Buddhism. To use the words of Søren Kierkegaard: "It is not necessary to understand a person, but it is necessary to understand what this person understands."

1) Erich Fromm: *The Art of Loving*.

2) *Ibid*.



is the way toward the east?

ole inge bekkelund, norway

It is more or less human to experience certain areas in our personal lives with which we are dissatisfied. Much serious mental illness is to be seen among Westerners. At least according to several of the newspapers and magazines that we read.

In Kathmandu I met a Norwegian physiotherapist with more than 100 clients during the year, who had visited the same massage institute in Bangkok that our group did - the Wat Poh Institute. This woman told me that after a "hurting" hour of this Thai-massage, she asked them for which purpose they run the massage institute. She got the following answer:

"We do our job just for people to feel comfortable, for pleasure."

In the West such a massage is an important part of clients' medical treatment; people who need medical help, for instance, such as back problems or stress symptoms. But here they do it just for pleasure.

So-called hard-working office people in the West work 35-40 hours a week. Here in Thailand women carry burdens of up to 65-70 kilos, and for several hours a day! For up to 70-80-90 working hours a week! And yet, back problems are only a Western ailment? The stress problems too. How come?

This woman, a good-looking mother of two grown-up children, was deeply impressed by this and mentioned that something must have gone wrong in the West. "The problems of my clients do not have physical roots only. Something deeper in the Western communities has totally failed!"

No doubt, this is a challenge for both the Western communities, and the churches. The churches must be aware that an increasing number of Westerners are developing attitudes like this. Something really deep within our wealthy Western fellowship seems to have misunderstood certain basic human needs. Westerners are searching and searching. Is the way toward the East?

how can the church respond?

brian king, usa

Three questions have guided my purpose as a participant in this study tour:

1. Why are Westerners attracted to the various schools of Buddhism?
2. What does Christianity have to offer in the Buddhist context?
3. How can the Christian Church effectively evangelize traditional Buddhists and Christian converts to Buddhism?

My brief encounter with Theravada, Mahayana and Tibetan Buddhists in Thailand and Nepal left me with several initial impressions.

Firstly, although there are a multitude of reasons that Westerners cite as grounds for their attraction to Buddhism, my conversations with Western converts has led me to identify several reasons which seem to have the greatest significance for those to whom I have spoken. These include: the rejection of Western cultural values and/or the perceived hypocrisy and exclusivity of the institutional Christian Church as well as a lack of Christian role models and/or Christian meditation techniques. Furthermore, many Westerners are attracted by the Buddhist emphases on introspection and philosophical inquiry, Buddhist meditation techniques and Buddhism's utilitarian approach toward other religious teachings and practices.

Secondly, I believe that Christianity's greatest gift to the Buddhist world is the Christian belief in a single, benevolent God who both created and sustains all life, and through whose infinite grace all humanity receives forgiveness of sins and the promise of eternal life through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, the Lutheran understanding of justification by grace through faith on account of Christ is a message of hope and liberation for Buddhists who are oppressed by their belief in past *karmic* action and their elusive pursuit of enlightenment and self-salvation.

Thirdly, if the Christian Church is to effectively evangelize traditional Buddhists and Christian converts to Buddhism, then it must recover its prophetic voice as an advocate for justice, a catalyst for change and renewal, and as a community of grace. Because, to the extent that the church is seen as an institution it cannot be seen or act as the faithful people of God. An environment of grace which is conducive to open and honest dialogue among Christians should also be fostered in order that through such dialogue and sharing individual Christians might confirm and/or strengthen their personal faith.

Finally, Christians must be willing to appropriate and/or adapt cultural and religious practices (i.e. Buddhist meditation techniques) that do not conflict with, or hinder the gospel but, rather, may be harnessed in its service.

church needs to clean up image

ken gehrs, canada

I met a man in Thailand who struck me as very much like myself -- quiet, intellectual, a little nervous around new people -- except this man was wearing orange robes and had shaved all the hair from his head. This should not have surprised me, I had been in Thailand for five days and had seen many orange-robed, shaven-headed Buddhist monks. But they were all Thais and this one was, as I say, much like myself, including being born and raised in North America. The man's name is Santikaro, and our discussion is one of my strongest impressions.

As he broke down prejudice after prejudice, and as I learned about Buddhism and (I hope) he learned a little more about Christianity, I realized that this was a

dialogue between faiths, this was the way to understanding, this was how to deal with the challenge of Eastern religions to our Western churches.

To sum up what I learned on this trip about how the church needs to respond to the growing influence of Eastern religions in the West, I would say we need to clean up our image. Too often we are seen as believing that God is a white male who threatens us with hellfire if we don't behave; too often we are seen as preaching peace and that all people are equal, while we go to war and oppress minorities and women. More and more often (I hope) the church will call for true peace and real justice.

dialogue without words

johanna jämsä, finland



Study tour participants Jan Hrobon, Johanna Jämsä, Anette Thustrup Pind

You are young, beautiful and vital. I would like to hear your laughter. I would like to hear your thoughts and know your name. But, I cannot reach you. You sit by me but at the same time you are far away from me. You have turned away to be alone. Where are you? I cannot hear the answer, only silent wind from the palm trees and the rhythm of my own breath. Or isn't there any answer? Any question? You? Is this all only an illusion?!

Ninety Western meditators had once again gathered in the beautiful Garden of Liberation, in the middle of a palm forest in southern Thailand, Suan Mokkh. Ten days filled with Buddhist sitting and walking meditation, Buddhist teaching, chanting, and first of all in silence. Not a single word could be heard - except during chanting hours. We crashed into that world, on the ninth day of silence.

There were seven of us, participants in the study tour of the Lutheran World Federation. I felt like an intruder. No one could avoid noticing our entrance. We girls sat on the boys' side in the meditation hall. We were hardly able to eat any of the super healthy food, we screamed when seeing a terrible spider in the sleeping "cell": "I am really sorry for interrupting your meditation. But not only did we disturb you. You also disturbed us, forced us to think many things and also try to be without thinking."

The purpose of Vipassana meditation is to concentrate on one's own breathing. All thoughts which arise must be let go. One's goal is to reach calmness and emptiness of mind. I tried to sit and walk thinking of my breathing. The silence did not bring emptiness for me. It filled my mind with a question and I did not want to let it go. I caught it with two hands.

My question is **why?** Why do you, like hundreds of others, want to retreat to meditate? To accept strict rules and silence? To listen to Buddhist teaching without asking questions and without discussing? So what are you searching for? What do you find? Because I couldn't get any answers from you in the silence I'll put some words in your mouth. Did I find the right words?

That you must evaluate for yourself:

You are searching for the purpose of life, just like me. And we are searching just like all the others. It is a huge challenge amid a crazy world. Who wouldn't like to find some order in this chaos!

Buddhism offers a very pleasant answer. Life can be controlled. Everything in this world has its logical reason. Everyone is responsible for his/her own life. All that you have now is a result of your acts in previous lives. By meditation you can influence your future. You can free yourself from selfishness. You can free yourself from the craziness of this world.

You have a more clever answer than I, as a Christian, can offer. I cannot explain the disasters that I see. I have to admit to myself that there is a lot of pain without sense. My alternative to Buddhist logic is simply faith. I ask you to believe like a child in God, to trust God the Father, whose thoughts are so much higher than ours that we cannot understand everything. I do not offer you a well ordered cosmos but faith in the midst of chaos.

You want to be intelligent and you choose Buddhism instead of believing? Or isn't there also belief in Buddhism? What is that *nirvana* that you are searching for? How do you know it is real outside of your own thoughts that you yourself call a part of illusion?

I share your opinion about the need to be rid of selfishness. For you the way is meditation. We asked one monk how it is possible to free oneself from selfishness by turning to one's own center. I did not understand his way of explaining the difference of selfishness and the right kind of self-centeredness. And in the end, what is the meaning of turning to wherever if nothing according to Buddhism is real? If one has to get rid of everything unreal one has to get free from oneself? What is left? The monk also talked about "no-self" as an opposite to selfishness. What is that?

As a Christian I think it's a pity if you want to be "no-self." I believe you are a masterpiece of God's creation. We should take good care of all creation in the world. Not in a selfish way but by loving ourselves and all the others in a healthy way. Couldn't that be the opposite to selfishness? Even then it wouldn't be easier than concentrating on one's own breathing.

Are you one of those who have been disappointed in the Christian church? What do you blame the church for? I suppose not for too many regulations? Anyway you are ready to accept at least as many regulations here in the Garden of Liberation. You eat, walk and sleep only with your own sex, you eat very "ascetic" food, you sleep in a bed made of concrete, you are silent. I suppose you do all this being sure it is good for you. You do not think the morality the church teaches could work for you? It is difficult for me to under-

stand why you, as a person searching for rationality, are ready to be like a sheep among the others reciting in the midst of silence the words with which Buddhist monks confess their faith: "To the Buddha for refuge we go. To the Dhamma for refuge we go. To the Sangha for refuge we go."

Are you aware of what you are confessing? Do you really want to be a Buddhist or is this just a game for you? Can it be just a game?

It feels good to be silent. Your mind gets refreshed. All the busy days with too many stimulants can be forgotten. This peace is what I have been looking for. But do you think Buddhism is needed for reaching this? Haven't you heard about Christian meditation? Think about the same silence as is here now, your taking time for yourself just like here now. All this with the exception that you wouldn't be alone but with God. Silence and peace wouldn't be focused on turning inward, emptying yourself and tuning out from the world around you. God would be with you in your silence, not emptying but filling you with His love and peace. That silence would be making you ready to live in the world with yourself serving others. It would be meditation in which not you, but God would be curing your self.

As a matter of fact I seldom hear anyone speaking about this kind of meditation, Christian meditation. Anyhow I have been practicing it, as Christians always have. Do you think it would be worth trying?



Participant Lena Bergquist and resource-person Jutta Weinkouff

study tour

garden of liberation

solange wydmusch, france

On a trip that includes so many contrasts to life in the West, it is extremely difficult to describe what impressed me most. Especially since there are no points of comparison between the cultures in Thailand and Nepal. Everything is different - on the one hand, Thailand with its customs and smells - on the other, Nepal with its noise and other smells, a country where each stone seems to be holy. The impressions I will describe here are those that preoccupy me the most and take most of the space in my diary.

It was in Suan Mokkh, a monastery in the south of Thailand, in a wonderful garden called "The Garden of Liberation." Some monks live there. But there were also some people from consumer societies who had come there to attend a ten-day meditation course. The whole thing takes place in complete silence. Nobody exchanges words, nobody shares anything with another - everybody lives in his/her own world as if locked up in a cocoon or in Luther's words: Incarnatus in seipsum (incarnated in him/herself). I found it quite disquieting to be walking around in a garden where somebody was carrying out a meditation exercise every ten meters.

Although space-wise we were far from Europe, it seemed very close because individualism dominated. The only moments when words were exchanged, or rather tunes, were the times of singing: all are gathered in a meditation room facing Buddha. One monk recites a sentence in Pali and the participants repeat the same, also in Pali (religious language of Buddhism).

Some examples:

buddham saranam gacchami (...)
to the buddha for refuge we go.

tatiyampi dhamman saranam gacchami (...)
a third time to the sangha for refuge we go.

surameraya majjapamadatthana veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami (...)
I undertake the training to refrain from substances that intoxicate and lead to carelessness.

yo ca buddhanca dhammanca samghanca saranam gato
cattari ariyasaccano sammappannaya passati
those who seek refuge in buddha-dhamma-sangha
through right wisdom find the four noble truths.

How can you be in agreement with such ritual sentences? Buddhism does not pursue mission, it is a **philosophy**. The participants are, however, subject to strong influences from their consciousness. They come to regain inner peace and balance in order to flee from stress, but do they really want to sing in praise to Buddha? Are they aware of what they are meddling with when they repeat the words of Buddha? Do they know that Buddhism is a religion and not only a philosophy? Unfortunately we could not discuss with the participants. In the evening, before the end of the meditation course and while participants still had to remain silent, we left. I found this regrettable. I would have liked to talk with them. Do they really know the unique liberation that the Christian faith offers? Has someone told them about the power of God? Have the churches fulfilled their mission? Why then do people go on a pilgrimage to the Garden of Liberation?

confused and challenged

anette thustrup plnd, denmark

When I was invited to participate in this trip I did a lot of things to learn more about Buddhism. As I left Denmark I felt that I knew a lot of things about Buddhism and that I was going on this trip to have my knowledge confirmed.

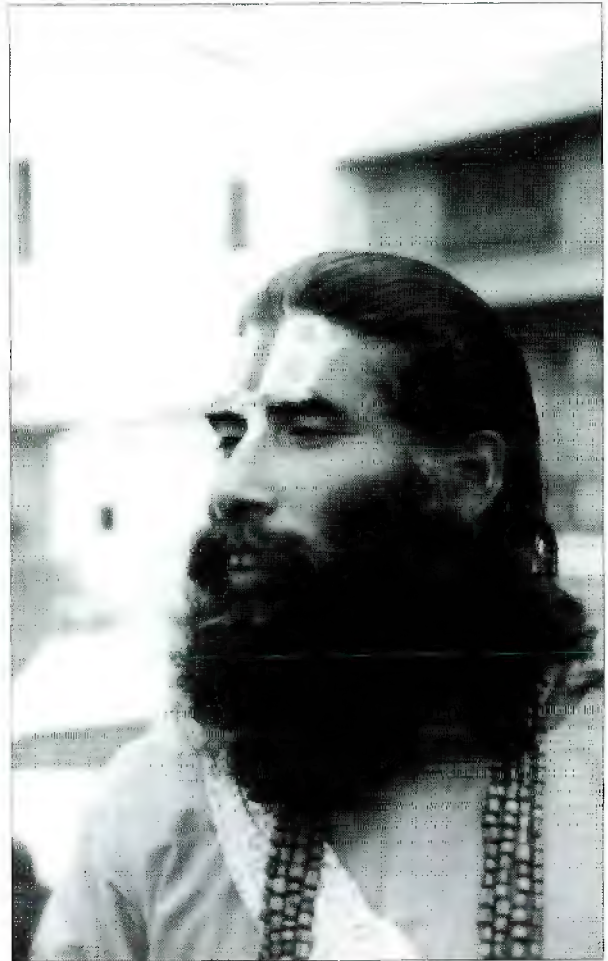
Therefore, the first couple of days I was quite confused by the Buddhism I experienced. It seemed as if every monk in Thailand had decided that Buddhism is not at all what I had read about in several books. Some monks even said different things about Buddhism. My confusion was total!

After a few days we split into two groups and I joined the one which went south to Suan Mokkh where we participated in a retreat at an international retreat center. I used the time in silence to think about a lot of things and especially to digest all my experiences so far. The good thing about it was also that we could talk with a monk, and afterwards we discussed our impressions within our group. For example, the monk said that there also is reincarnation in Christianity. I felt rather confused about that. But after talking to my group I understood that he meant that our forgiveness is a kind of reincarnation, because the Bible says that we are born again every time our sins are forgiven.

I realized that a Christian is a very lucky person because of God's forgiveness. We don't have to do a lot of things, we are only supposed to have faith in God. I also realized that Christianity is a "human" religion, where we share questions and feelings, whereas the Buddhism I encountered at the retreat center was egoistic in the way that they just sat down and meditated, getting to know themselves; but it doesn't help other people. It is a lonesome kind of religion.

These are some of the thoughts you have when you are watching ninety people walk around in silence for ten days and listening to lectures about Buddhism that they are not even allowed to discuss. It really confirmed my own faith, and that I should tell other people about it more honestly.

Another great thing with this trip was that it also contained other things than Buddhism. It showed us the social side of the WYIE (Western Youth in the East) project. For example, we visited a prison and talked to several people there. It was terrible to stand there with five meters and three bars between you and the prisoner. All of them had visitors at the same time, so you had to scream to make yourself heard. It was hard to realize the circumstances in which these prisoners live. It made me think about the situation of prisoners in Denmark -- if there are also prisoners there who never have visitors?



Hindu yogi from Kathmandu

I think that my deepest experience in Thailand was the encounter with life in another country and with Buddhism and getting to know more about Christianity. Suddenly I recognized that I need to know more about myself and my own faith. I will seek out people of another religion -- or no religion at all -- in my own community.

But it is really difficult to write about the deepest experience, because I have it all in my heart and it is hard to write down. It feels like my "heart-language" (myths) gets much more technical on paper -- and it is a pity in the case of my feelings about this trip. I have many pictures in my head that, unfortunately, I can't share with you on paper.

But this trip has surely given me a kick to go home and study more -- and to be more honest about my own faith.

study tour

buddhism, a philosophy of psychotherapy ???

ole inge bekkelund, norway



visit to wat pah nanachat

One morning a group of seven young Western people arrived at Wat Pah Nanachat, an international forest monastery, situated in an overgrown forest. This branch of Theravada Buddhism, which is represented here, welcomes Westerners in large numbers to retreat from noisy surroundings and seek the mind in all its forms.

The monastery is situated several kilometers from Ubon Rachantani about 600 km to the northeast of Bangkok. All of us seven were Christians from different backgrounds and had rather limited ideas about what we were about to experience. Men staying for more than three days must shave their heads, including beards and eyebrows, to show a spirit of commitment and renunciation. We stayed only two days!

In complete silence, twenty Western monks, all from Europe, Canada, the USA and Australia, have spent years of their lives here, training their minds in meditation. A keyword was **"mind-practice."** Every monk was supposed to meditate every day and practice becoming more and more **"mindful."** The goal was a refuge from suffering in this (Western) world, from the great emptiness to enter the real **"mind-world."** The whole monastery, in an area of about 200 acres of thick forest, contributed to the silence, providing the best surroundings for a quiet, peaceful life. Every monk has his own hut, situated alone in the forest, in which he can meditate (and sleep) in silence.

the daily routine

Group meetings and periods of work had equal importance as did formal meditation, both in the big halls and the huts. As laypeople we were expected to join in the activities, which we did.

- 3.30 a.m. wake-up
- 4.00 - 5.30 a.m. chanting and meditation
- 6.00 - 7.30 a.m. sweeping and helping out in the kitchen
- 8.00 a.m. the "alms-round," where people from the nearby villages made offerings to the monks.
- about 8.30 a.m. the only meal of the day, followed by cleaning up, meditation practice, study
- 3.00 - 5.00 p.m. work period of hauling water, cleaning buildings
- 5.00 p.m. drink at abbot's "kuti"
- 7.00 - 9.30 p.m. meditation, chanting and Dhamma talks

This daily schedule changes during times of retreat and on Buddhist holidays ("wan phra"). On "wan phra" the community and some visitors make the effort to stay up all night without lying down and practice meditation until 5 a.m.

The atmosphere was unreal in several ways. A nice, silent place called for restricted behavior, all these shaved heads, and swept paths on which people only used sandals; in the big hall they had placed a skeleton and a dead embryo to be used in meditation on death. Outside the hall they cremated the dead. Families from far away brought their relatives to have them burned here. The thought occurred to us that this must be a splendid place for a fourteen-day retreat, with or without hair. But what happens after fourteen years of such silence?

The monks certainly did have a social life together, but mainly limited to afternoon tea in the abbot's house. Cosy and relaxing comments and behavior dominated this tiny room where, like a miracle, they managed to welcome all of the approximately fifteen visitors. It was like a rest after a hard day's work where employees could gather and share jokes. Some felt rather happy to discover new faces; quite understandable considering that the monks all know each other after months and years in this society. However, the monks didn't seem to enjoy talking to each other very much. In other words, this was a real life of eremites, a complete withdrawal from the stressing urbanized world, an entering into a tiny monk community in the forest. And in this forest world they practiced meditation to enable themselves to enter their "mindworld."

terravada buddhism, "mindfulness"

As one of the major branches of Buddhism, Terravada is to be found primarily in the south of Asia, and especially in Thailand. Wat Pah Nanachat is among the monasteries that belong to the Terravada tradition, which is not supposed to be as altruistic as Mahayana and Tibetan Buddhism. Its emphasis is to achieve enlightenment through long periods of "brainpracticing"; only a few people are able to do this. But, on the other hand, they teach the possibility of reaching enlightenment within this life, which differs from the other traditions. "The great vehicle" and "the lesser vehicle" is said to illustrate this difference.

Terravada also differs from the Mahayana tradition as far as the doctrine of "the personal I" is concerned. As Mahayana Buddhism doesn't struggle with any "I," avoiding speculation about any hedonistic ego which for instance moves the personality toward achieving a better *karma*. The Terravada Buddhism, on the other hand, can speak of the "One who knows." The "One who knows" is the one who perceives that the mind simply is the mind. The Terravada tradition stresses, together with the Mahayana tradition, though, that it is definitely not speaking about a person, ego, or a self. After the following, we will probably discover that Westernized Terravada philosophy is moving toward a doctrine where the "self" is more developed and active than they would admit. Terravada establishes a triangle where a "self-like" "One who knows" is be-

yond both mind and the "sense-objects" (which will be discussed below).

one who knows

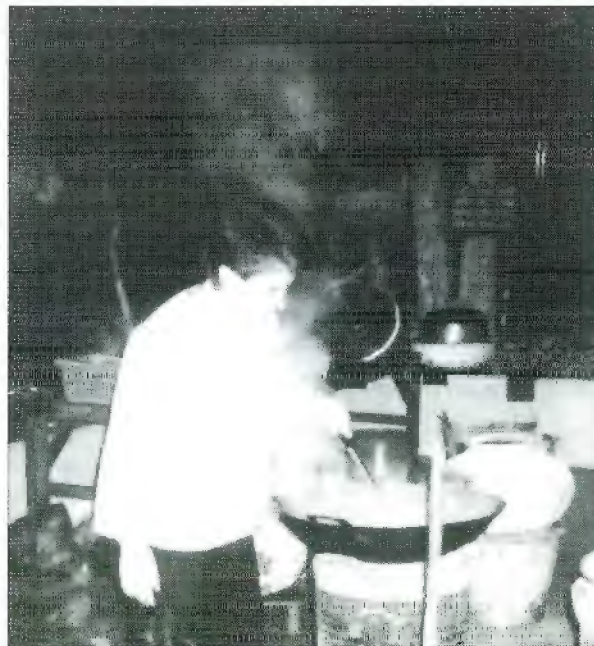
.....

mind <---- sense-objects

So what, then is the mind?

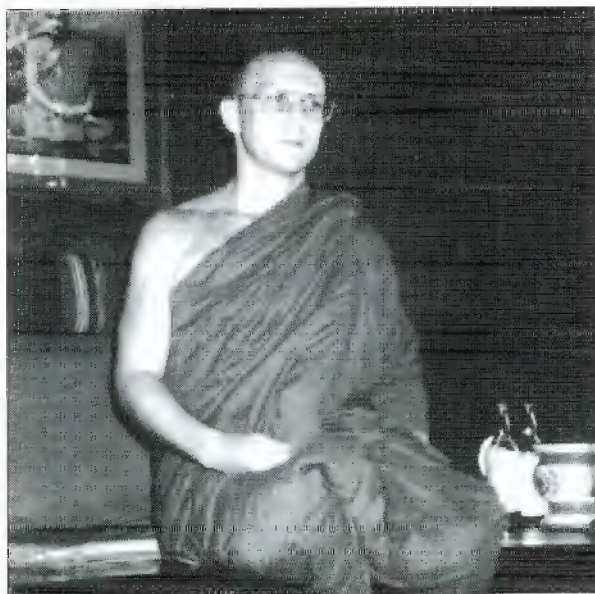
The mind is what acknowledges the impressions' sense as such. The mind is aware of what "wanders into" the mind. What acknowledges sound as a sound is called "mind." Sound is not a being, it is neither individual, nor self. It is just a sound and must be considered as nothing more than that. If we perceive it in this way, this knowledge is called "buddho." It is the knowledge that is "penetrating," it is not the truth. We can just let the sound pass us by. It doesn't disturb us unless we cling to it, thinking: "Oh, I'm annoyed at that sound, I don't want to hear people speak like that. I don't want to hear sounds like that." So suffering arises. Right here the Terravada Buddhists teach that suffering has its origin. The cause of suffering is that we don't know the truth of the matter, we haven't developed "buddho." The mind has to be further contemplated to develop "awakeness." At starting point the mind is just plain unpurified mind. This mind is not really useful yet. Therefore Buddha taught training of the mind.

To practice meditation, to strengthen the mind, is to bring it to rest. To strengthen it means to train it to concentrate, to avoid moving around in the mind, where everything that happens around you is registered (like the stress in the Western world) and takes up the forefront.



Western novice in Wat Pah Nanachat

study tour



The abbot

For instance, by meditating on breathing in and out, mention is placed on the rhythm, there is concentration and effort to let go of all else. (One monk we met practiced so-called walking meditation while repeating to himself: "Let go...let go...let go...let go..."). Our mind will gain in energy because it has only one object of attention. After practice you will discover that your mind doesn't jump about, here and there, any longer.

Because of this the mind must be trained to cut out only the things that are useful to cut out. If the mind doesn't concentrate, then one can't clearly perceive the sense objects.

The knowledge that mind is mind, object is object, is the root from which Buddhism has been able to grow, it is the heart of Buddhism.

Now it is probably easier to understand the triangle-like relation between the mind, sense objects and the "One who knows." The "One" is beyond both the mind and the sense objects. Ordinary people of today do not know what to contemplate on concerning the body. "We can see hair, nails, teeth...so what?" people say. That is how people are made. They only see the body visually, simply the body, things are seen as incomplete and are not seen with the "**buddho**."

The mind can always lie to us unless we do a lot of practicing. A step further above the mind is the "One who knows," who knows the state of the mind. Therefore the mind is to be contemplated and trained. The mind is what perceives the sense objects. This is what we should concentrate on.

discussions with the abbot, mr. ajahn pasanno

(Each monk receives a new name when entering the monastery. The 42-year-old abbot came here more than seventeen years ago. He was born in England).

As we have seen from the above chapter, the emphasis of this teaching is more like a school of psychology than how we usually think of religion. Although we should remember that this was only part of a whole, and basically concerning meditation which, on the other hand, is the most basic and important thing. Meditation is the tool with which one can reach higher understanding. Mentioning this, let's hear what the abbot himself feels about the comparison between psychotherapy and their Theravada Buddhism:

- There is more moral consistency in Buddhism.
- Psychotherapy does not teach about the continuity of life - rebirth.
- To a certain degree the goals are different, he said. Whereas the purpose of psychotherapy is the "integration of the human being, making identities whole, Buddhism emphasizes the liberation from limitations and a (so-called) personal world existence.

He did mention that there were certain similarities. His whole attitude toward the relevance of this question was indeed positive. (In several monastery libraries, not only in Wat Pah Nanachat, we found books written by Freud and Jung).

To the question as to whether Western monks with their Greek-Hellenistic worldview, could be able to "choose" rebirth and *karma* (and a cyclic attitude toward history) to be important contents of their lives, he answered:

- There is not a question of choice. Rebirth and *karma* is something that you grow into. Only through long practice of the mind do you reach a certain level of understanding.

Here we see that one's attitude toward the world has the potential of being fundamentally changed. It depends only on how far one has come up the stepladder of enlightenment. This understanding also helps one to ask the right questions - and, of course, to avoid asking the wrong ones (as we did!!!). In this way we got the following answer to the question about the beginning and the end of human/worldly existence:

- You are asking the wrong questions.

summing up: human-made mind games with human minds

There were two reasons why the monks were at this monastery after escaping from the West:

1. Western society as a whole (communism failed, capitalism fails).
2. Different Christian churches - how they are structured, how the churches' teaching creates double morals, and how pastors fail to reach the spiritual needs of today's people.

These two matters will be discussed by others in this publication.

The abbot himself also referred to similar categories. But after telling about one monk who came from Denmark, a former anarchist, he said: "All monks here are 'characters' in one way or another." After spending two days at the monastery (still with our hair!!!), we definitely could confirm this impression. The abbot meant that the people who live there have more striking "characteristics" than what he considers as the "human average."

Most of the monks at Wat Pah Nanachat had been dealing with certain personal problems in their "last Western life." It was therefore not primarily religious matters that made them interested in heading eastwards. Let us say that in general the reason was a common dissatisfaction and lack of settled-down-personalities. For them, the West was not a suitable place to cope with different personal dissatisfactions. Something was wrong with their lives in one way or another. The outer life of the West failed to correspond with their inner one.

There obviously are things and matters of Western societies, such as the life style as a whole, stress, wealth, materialistic worldview -- that seem difficult to deal with for people in the West, unless one has a certain mental stability, enabling one to do something with it instead of avoiding it, pretending it does not exist.

After years of meditating, one can program the mind to believe and perceive almost anything. If one concentrates on a cake long enough, one will finally see cakes almost everywhere, no matter what other people say. What one is convinced of, and how one's mind is trained, really depends on which "diskette" you have put into your brain. In the end it is only a man-made mind game that they are playing to solve disturbing thoughts. Our question is therefore: What characterizes Westerners who need to train their mind so much in order to "illusionize" the suffering, so that they may get rid of their personal dissatisfactions completely? What needs do these people have that the Western societies don't provide? And are these needs rooted in

mental problems and instability, or are the institutions of the West fully to blame?

We're taking a risk asking like this, but in our opinion it is of utmost importance. It is our conviction that a lot of people end up in these monasteries for years mainly because of personal and psychological instability and rootlessness. In a way people try, by mentally denying the physical world, to re-establish a "self," "ego," inner world, or personality of the mind, that helps the person relate to realities to which they couldn't before.

These needs don't necessarily call for suitable religious ideas and doctrines. But to some extent the people are simply seeking mental help. It is very difficult to establish a borderline between religious and psychological needs. Nevertheless it is important to put emphasis on the humanistic, psychological matters, that quite a number of Westerners today do cope and struggle with. This is a challenge for the churches, and no less a challenge both for psychiatry and psychology.

How can we all, friends and neighbors, help cater to these mental needs, so that people don't have to enter a fictive world of the mind, pretending that the problems do not exist? How can we help ourselves and our neighbors to understand the importance of dealing with and working out our problems, to create better conditions for social life instead of to resign and escape??

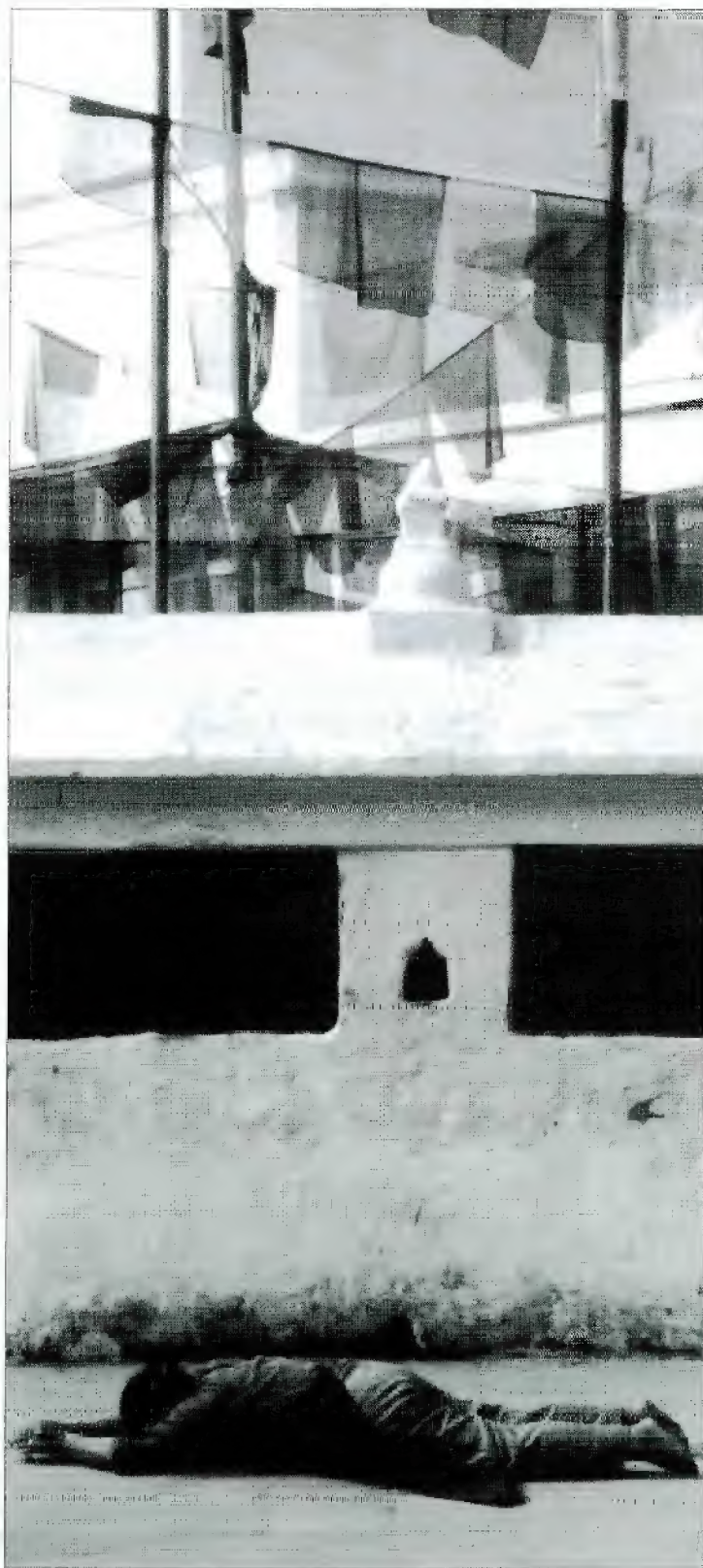
Jesus, our Lord, showed us how he went straight into the most painful suffering a human being can imagine -- the death on the cross. He did this because the suffering and evil in this world was a reality. To make a better world and to re-establish the relation with the Father, Jesus lived in the sinful world, shared in solidarity with human conditions. He didn't escape into any philosophic world of the mind....



Young Tibetan monks in Kathmandu

chocolate cheesecake, please!

Johanna Jämsä, Finland



Buddhist devotion, Kathmandu

One of the things I was expecting from the study tour was a clear picture of Buddhism. I wanted to get all those small pieces of information I had beforehand into order. I wanted to bake a cake from the flour.

I have to admit that I didn't reach that goal. The result was not a beautiful delicious cake. Instead, I got some cookies. The study tour taught me that one Buddhism as such does not exist. A logical and common structure of dogmas is as much a utopia for Buddhists as it is for Christians. There are different schools, which dogmatically have in common only as much as different cookies have in common: the jam. In Buddhism the "jam" is the dogmas about the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path. Opinions about the meaning of this "jam" vary. Although I love cakes more I also learned during the study tour to accept Buddhism as cookies. In any case, the most important thing is that I learned to love dough!

Sin came into the world when a man wanted to know everything like God. That is what I would also like. I would like to know and understand everything. I would like to be able to control myself, my life, and all the knowledge I could get. I would like to bake the best cake in the world of my life! (Chocolate cheesecake greetings to Carol!) Who wouldn't like to be the baker of his life?

Oh, you old devil - Buddhism promises just that. One of the basic ideas in it is that everything in life is a result of your own acts in the past. You are responsible for everything. Life gets its explanation from *karma* and rebirth. The key to changes in life is meditation. When you compare Christianity with Buddhism you feel like comparing dough to freshly baked, delicious cookies (not a cake). Buddhism provides answers to many questions which remain unanswered in Christianity.

I am not able to bake a cake of my life but I know the baker. God is the baker. He has the recipe. In his hands my life is like dough. I am called to lie in his hand, trusting in Him. If I am not willing to be His dough, I will become a Buddhist.

Above all, I want to live as dough waiting for the cake parties prepared in Heaven - and those parties will never end!

to be shaved - or to be saved

tamas fabiny, hungary

These two weeks were full of expected and unexpected experiences. It was an excellent way to learn. Theory and praxis were in perfect harmony; it was good to hear lectures on Buddhism, Hinduism, on missionary work and on the Lutheran World Service. The most exciting days, of course, were those that we spent in monasteries, or visiting prisons, or meeting people in northern Thailand and Bangkok. We picked up some ideas about their religion, customs, traditions and all the problems within their societies.

Let me mention just a few examples, some of the most meaningful to me:

Birth: An overcrowded prison cell, hundreds of people from Burma and other countries. We are shocked. It is almost impossible to give the bananas, oranges, soap and toothpaste in our hands to anyone because there are so many people on the other side of the fence. They are so many and you feel so helpless. Suddenly you hear the cry of a newborn baby. You look in that direction: a woman is lying on the dirty floor, just giving birth to her son. Other women in the prison and a doctor help her. The baby seems to be healthy, she is very exhausted. You just stand there and try to pray: "God, help this little baby, your creation, and his mother; give them a better life!" You feel shocked, but happy at the same time. God might be there in the dirt as well just like when Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

And the other extreme, death: The funeral of a man at the holy site in Kathmandu. You stand there, observe the ritual and try to understand the ancient tradition.

Life and death and so much in between!

The huge eyes of little children in Bangkok and Kathmandu, their dirty hands and clean voices.

Monastery-life: shaved monks, seemingly far away from the reality of life.

Missionaries doing a wonderful job. The LWF World Service projects, giving drinking water to the people in the valleys, improving living conditions and helping the refugees.

Unfortunately there are many Westerners who come to this part of Asia only for cheap holidays, sex, etc. Many others are attracted by the exotic teachings of Buddhism.

I met many Western monks who tried to find their inner peace through meditation and other Buddhist practices. I tried to understand them, but honestly speaking I felt them to be far away from the reality of life. They were shaved -- but did not seem to find a personal God, a Savior. I felt happy that as a child of God I can say: I'm saved through Jesus Christ. And I can pray for all these people with the hope that the love of God reaches them as well.

We are all His creatures and children. He wants to love us all.

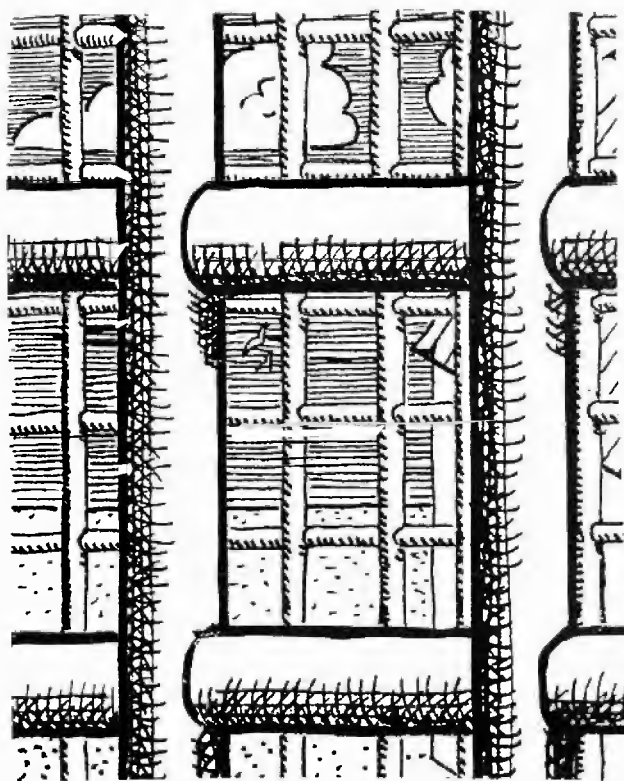


Funeral of holy man in Kathmandu

study tour

social ministry to westerners

carol schmidt, australia



In addition to investigating the religious scene attracting Westerners to Eastern roots, our study tour also touched on the social problems among Western travelers in the East. The situation in Thai prisons is a significant part of this.

Some sources say that there are 400-500 Western prisoners in Thailand, with approximately 100 of these female. The vast majority of the sentences are for drug offenses, mostly trafficking heroin out of Bangkok. Other reasons for imprisonment include being caught in possession of false travelers cheques or having no visa or passport.

The major prisons holding Western prisoners include three in Bangkok, one in Chiang Mai (northern Thailand), one in Surat Thani (southern Thailand) and one in Pattaya. Our contact with prisoners included the Klong Prem prison in Bangkok which has about 5,000 prisoners, as well as the IDC (Immigration Detention Center), also in Bangkok.

Before these visits, we had an opportunity to speak with the mother of a woman who has been imprisoned for seven and a half years at Klong Prem. Meeting her made a strong impact on all of us, because we could see how it's not just the life of the person imprisoned which is torn apart, but that the suffering extends in a very real sense to those close to the prisoner. This

meeting was our first taste of beginning to understand that the prison situation isn't just something you read about or see in a movie on the other side of the world -- this is real-life stuff with real-life people, unbelievable and unfair as it may seem.

Prisoners are only allowed to have visitors once a week for about twenty minutes, and even then no physical contact is allowed. Only twice a year is the prisoner able to touch, hug, meet and talk closely face to face with his/her visitor. All other visits take place in the manner that we experienced when we visited the male prison at Klong Prem.

Three strong-barred fences and about three meters' distance separate you (and the outside world) and the person inside the prison with whom you're speaking. In order to hear each other, you need to almost shout across the distance, and because there are many people right next to you along the fences also doing the same, you need often to repeat yourself or try to shout louder than your neighbors. You find yourself with your face pressed hard against the bars of the closest fence and your body half climbing up the fence in order to see the prisoner you're talking to as best you can. When you come away, you find you have the cheap silver paint used on the bars across your nose, your forehead, your hands and your arms. There is immense frustration at having to piece the other person's face together because of the three sets of bars between you and because of not being able to clearly hear each word you both say. There is almost a sense of the ridiculous due to the demeaning situation you are forced to communicate within. One is reminded very much of being in a zoo, with many monkeys chattering, screeching and hanging from their cage bars, with patrolling guards keeping a check on everyone's behavior like zoo-keepers. So much for the dignity of every human being....

From what we were told by the prisoners, the conditions inside are pretty awful. The food is terrible and unnutritious, there is virtually no private life, beatings are not uncommon, it is difficult to get any medicine or medical assistance if needed, let alone any psychological help. Prisoners are let out of their cells early in the morning into a large square yard with basically nothing in it, and are locked back in their cell in the early evening, after which time the cell doors remain locked until the next morning. One prisoner described it by saying that even if someone was murdered at night in their cell, the doors would not be opened.

The prison rules change almost daily, and also change depending on which guard you're dealing with, what mood they're in and how many dollars or "presents" you slip them. Money can really make a difference to

your conditions as a prisoner. Bribing a guard can maybe allow you to receive a personal gift from a visitor which otherwise would not be allowed through. If you have enough money you can perhaps be promoted to a cell of your own, and the story goes that you can even buy your way out of the jail sentence in the first place if you bribe the police who arrest you!

There is uncertainty about everything, including the length of your sentence. How long your stay is depends on which "behavior" class you are in, if your application for a king's pardon or amnesty (cuts in your sentence) is accepted, how supportive your country's embassy is and whether or not you pleaded guilty to the charge laid against you. For example, for drug trafficking you might get twenty or twenty-five years if you plead guilty, and maybe double that if you plead not guilty. In other parts of the world, you are innocent unless proven guilty according to the legal system, but Thai law works on the reverse principle, and "justice" just doesn't seem to come into it.

From what we heard, the female prison differs from the male prison in that the rules are far more strict. For instance, women prisoners are prohibited from any physical exercise in case they become too strong and rebel against the guards, and the inside of the female prison is virtually drug-free -- which cannot be said for the male prison at Klong Prem.

Another difference in treatment is that Thai prisoners are generally treated more harshly than are Western prisoners. The reason for this appears to be that Westerners have an embassy to protect them and in addition sometimes have volunteers visiting them who work on their behalf in the outside world. The importance of the work of these volunteers cannot be emphasized enough. Not only do they act as advocates in dealing with the embassies for example, but they are often the prisoners' only link with the outside world, through whom the prisoner can receive news of the world, stimulus other than from the same "inside" faces, some decent food, needed personal articles, and mail or money which may otherwise not reach its destination if sent through the prison system.

Most of the volunteers are from Christian organizations. These include a team from Christchurch International Anglican Church in Bangkok which visits mainly the women's prison; a Jesuit father from an international Catholic church primarily involved with visiting African prisoners, and a German Lutheran congregation in Bangkok which is doing amazing work through a comprehensive program for the German prisoners. The benefits -- psychological, political and personal -- for the prisoners seem to be significant.

Church work is also involved at the IDC (Immigration Detention Center), which is the prison where people are taken to if caught in Thailand without a visa or passport. Most of the prisoners are refugees from

Burma, Laos, Kampuchea, Vietnam or China, plus a handful of Western "travelers" who have overstayed their visa or been living illegally in Thailand, or who have been transferred from one of the main prisons while final details are arranged with the embassies: airline tickets, etc. (a process which can take between five hours and three weeks). The length of the prisoner's stay is unlimited -- if they can't find enough money to pay their fine and plane ticket out of the country, they basically have to stay there. Hence the roles of outside advocates are crucial, for if no one knows they are in there or can help them get out, and if they have no money (as most of them don't) who knows what might happen to them?

Conditions at the IDC are even worse than those at the main prison. Up to 250 people (including newborn babies) are crammed into large bare rooms designed to hold forty to forty-five. They spend day and night in this room, unless they use the attached bathroom which is equally as filthy and lacking in privacy as the main room. Children, however, are apparently let out to play in the corridors for two to three hours a day, supervised by guards. At night, prisoners must sometimes take turns lying down to sleep, because of the lack of space. The food is inadequate for the health of an adult, let alone for providing sufficient nutrients for the growth of a child, and it seems incidences of rape and beatings by the guards are not unusual.

Walking through these corridors as a free white outsider while being confronted by what seemed like thousands of Asian faces behind those bars, is an emotionally challenging experience to say the least. One feels such a sense of hopelessness. Having to face the children was the worst -- seeing their big sad eyes pleading at you, or watching them push and fight one another for any food brought in by visitors. One wonders what effect the IDC experience will have on the children later in their lives when they get out -- if they get out.



study tour

The work being done and which needs to be done is overwhelmingly endless. Yet there are these few people who are voluntarily devoting large chunks of their time, lives, love and energy to be there for the prisoners. Why do they do it? Some may say the prisoners deserve every bit of suffering they receive, for they knew the penalties before they committed the criminal offense.



However, everyone of us makes mistakes -- these people just made a mistake that landed them in this horrific situation. What right have we got, then, to judge them, to think of ourselves as better or more righteous? Something which was made extremely clear to those of us who visited some prisoners was that they are ordinary people just like us, with the same feelings, the same dreams and hurts and needs, the same thoughts of "this could never happen to me."

Putting ourselves on the other side of the bars, or imagining what it would be like if it was our sister or brother or lover being imprisoned and isolated in an overseas corrupt prison for years on end sheds a whole new light on the situation. It tears down the fear, prejudice and blame which are so easy to construct as a barrier between "them" and "me."

So what do I/we do as Christians, or as fellow human beings who believe all people are worthy of love and respect regardless of what they've done or where they are?

There are some major injustices or questions asking to be addressed, such as what is this form of punishment actually doing? Is it making the prisoners "better" people? Is it reducing the crime rate or the possibility

of recommitting later "crime"? Are there more effective ways that could actually help the person who has committed the crime, such as psychological assistance or really working through personal issues with the prisoner? Is it possible to address some of the social problems which may influence or predispose people to commit criminal offenses? How much of the reason for putting people away in an institution or prison is simply so our society doesn't have to think about them?

These are questions with no easy answers, and I really have no idea where to begin to address them. But in the meantime, working with the situation as it is, there are some practical ways we can make a difference. For several of us on the study tour, the feeling was that if ever we travel overseas again, we'd like to go into a prison just to speak with some of the prisoners, particularly those from our own country. You can imagine what a welcome sense of relief and release it is to finally be able to speak with someone in your own language (or accent!) and to hear news of your home country firsthand! For some of us it was isolating and frustrating enough to have to communicate in English, when it's not our first language, for two weeks on the study tour, let alone for several years in an alien institution.

Visiting prisoners is not just international work, it can also be done in our home countries. Many of us, before visiting Klong Prem and the IDC, felt slightly to very apprehensive about meeting the prisoners, but upon actually talking to them, we realized this fear was totally unfounded. These people honestly are just like us, and were happy to talk about anything. In addition we found we even enjoyed conversing with them.

For those of us who don't feel we can personally visit people in prison, support (financial and prayerful) for the organizations, churches and people that do is always needed and appreciated.

In our churches, it's so often easy to get bogged down in "moral" issues, or worry about internal conflicts or how much money the church building needs, that these other very real, very close to home, very vital needs and issues are forgotten.

From a Terravada Buddhist perspective, it is necessary for people such as prisoners to go through that suffering experience because their past actions or lives have put them there. They must suffer alone in order to burn their *karma* and increase their chances for a better reincarnation -- no one can help them through it.

In contrast, from the point of view of Jesus, human beings have worth and deserve care and compassion for who they are, not depending on their deeds or the situation they are in. The Christians whom we met working in the Bangkok prisons were a shining testimony to this!

a visit in prison gerd nestler, germany

The sun rises again over Bangkok, but it is so close and foggy that one doesn't see it at all. The streets are dusty and full of noise, the air is humid and hot. Today, our group is taken to the prison. The trip on the wavering diesel-driven boat, or the time spent in the hot sweltering city bus becomes a permanent memory. Once we arrive at the prison we first buy some fruit for the prisoners, and something to drink for ourselves. After having handed in our cameras, we are allowed to go in. We come to a cleanly swept prison courtyard in which there are even a few flower beds. It is hard to believe that we are in a detention center. But later we learn that the prison courtyard is just make-believe for visitors. Behind double bars and thick walls things are quite different. As if in a zoo we now stand in front of the bars and begin to talk to people from all over the world. Many of them look ragged, ill and downhearted. The conversations are as international as our group.

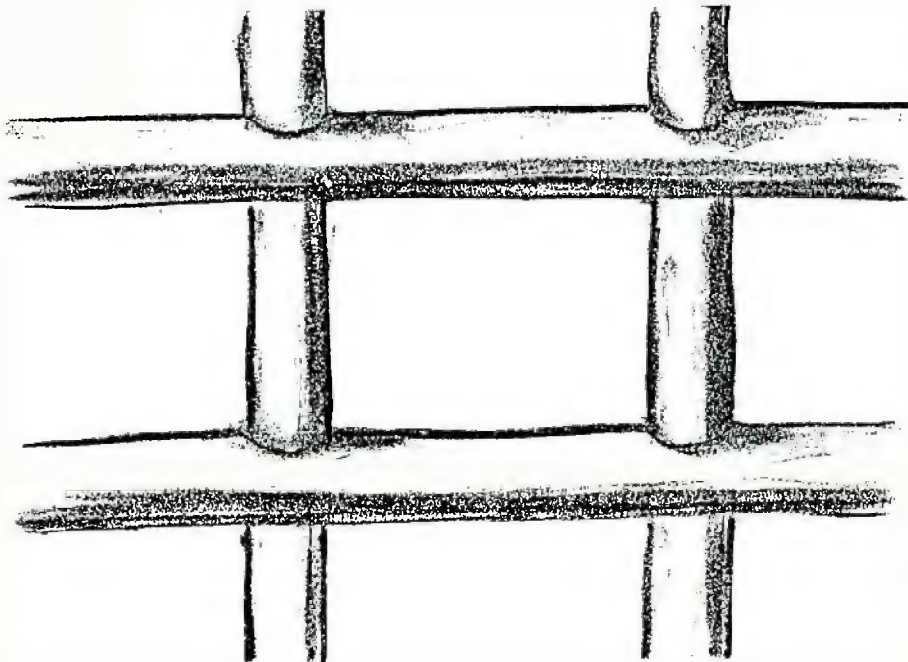
First I talk to a German. He tells me of his pleasant years in Thailand. At some stage he started to deal in drugs. Now he has already spent four and a half years in this prison, with fifteen and a half years still before him. He tells me all that in a rather apathetic way. When asked what keeps him alive and what gives him hope, he does not answer. I later learned that he takes all sorts of drugs like most of the inmates. Here in prison there is a real market for drugs. The guards are corrupt and earn a lot of money from drug trafficking since European prices are paid here. All that shakes me up quite a bit.

Then I talk to another man from Germany, someone from the former German Democratic Republic (GDR). As an East German I am particularly interested in his story. When the GDR still existed he had tried to flee to West Germany. He failed and landed in an East German prison. There things were worse than they are here in Thailand, he said. After having been bought free by the Federal Republic of Germany he tried his luck in Thailand, but he also came into conflict with the law because of drugs and was sentenced to four and a half years.

Now I talk to a German journalist who makes the strongest impression on me. His outward appearance is totally different from that of the others. He does not look so ragged and ill. He looks more like a holiday-maker than a prisoner. It is hard to believe that this man has been kept here for over five years. His mind is also active, as our conversation shows. It is he who tells me about the terrible drug problems of other prisoners. By listening to the radio, and by reading, he keeps in touch with the outside world. He is also taking a correspondence course in law and psychology with a German university. I find that astonishing. Then he tells me in a very credible way that his sentence for kidnapping was based on circumstantial evidence and that he is innocent. Later a German prison chaplain tells me that this story about an error of judgment is false and that he is, in fact, guilty. At home he has a wife and four children waiting for him. The journalist is convinced he will be released soon. The pastor assures me that he still has thirty years in prison to go.

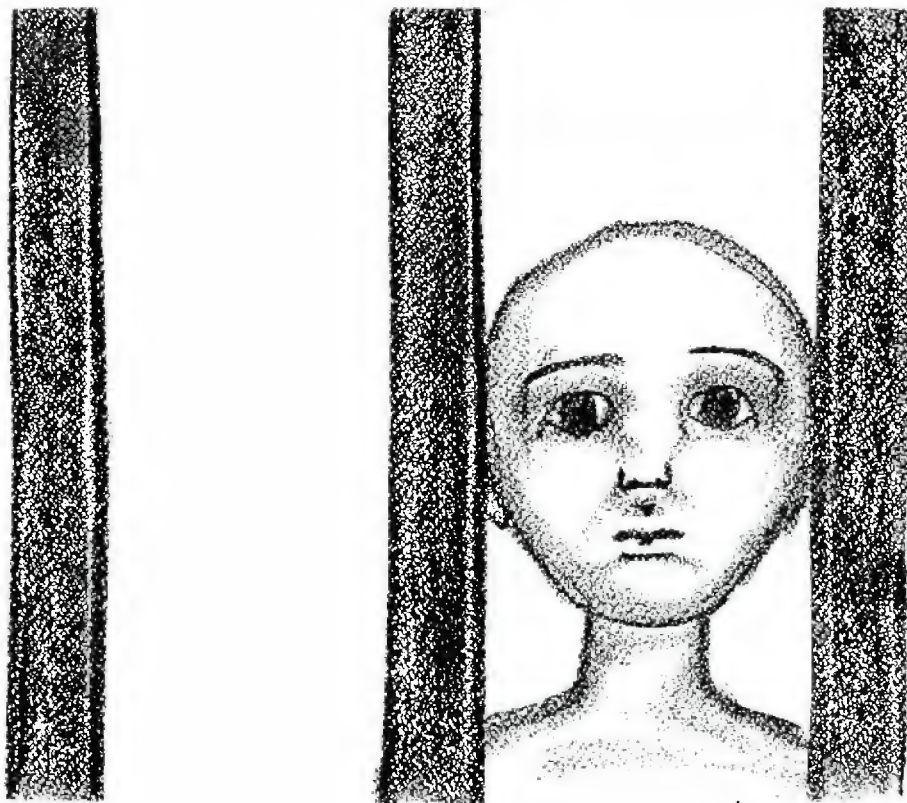
I am deeply moved, also by the journalist's will to survive.

A prison visit gives you very deep insight into the reality of a country. Thus this prison shows the other side of Thai smiles. For me that was a very important and impressive experience during our trip in Asia.



imprisoned children

lena bergqvist, sweden



My strongest experience during this study tour was the meeting with the children at the IDC (Immigration Detention Center). It was a terrible experience, and feeling, to see them behind bars. What a life! Two hours a day they are allowed to come out into the corridor and move around. I have been thinking a lot of how the life in prison will influence their lives. That's the question I have in my mind the whole time. Because as a child I've been through some terrible things, and I know how much they have destroyed my life, and still do.

These children haven't done anything wrong, but they are forced to be in prison with their mothers. It's very common that the guards treat prisoners badly. Sometimes they also rape some of the women. It must be terrible for these children to see things like that. Their souls must be full of terrible experiences. Will they ever get rid of it? Will they get any help at all to overcome these experiences?

In prison the children don't get any stimulation at all, neither physical nor psychological. The food they get is very, very bad. We all know what that means for a growing child. Their eyes were empty and staring. I got the feeling that some of them didn't see me even if they were looking at me. I tried to give some of them bananas, but it was very difficult. The women started to fight because of the bananas.

I saw one boy who was very sick. I don't think he will survive the time in prison. Just as I came to the prison a little boy was born on the floor of one cell. It was a shock for me because I had not expected to see anything like that. To what kind of life was this boy born?

The feeling I had when I walked on the "right" side of the bars is very difficult to explain. I felt like a very strange person walking around and looking at the prisoners, like monkeys in a cage. We gave some of them soap or a toothbrush.

A lot of thoughts were on my mind, and after I had been there for nearly an hour I could just walk out and leave the prison. But the children have to stay! They will be in my heart for ever. I like children very much, therefore I think this is one of the reasons why this was such a hard experience for me.

hope and life?

carol schmidt, australia

Something that made a huge impression on me is a picture which remains vividly in my mind from the Immigration Detention Center (IDC) in Bangkok.

Six of us from the study tour group visited the IDC, which is basically a prison for people who are caught living in Thailand illegally, i.e. without a passport or visa. We had seen a few photographs of the conditions in which people must live, for example, each room containing so many people that they have to take turns lying down to sleep. But I still had no idea what to expect and was not prepared for what I saw.

We entered the prison two by two, about five minutes apart, so as not to arouse the guards' suspicion. Before entering the gates, our passports and cameras were taken and some of us were briefly body-searched.

As we walked along the corridors, multitudes of Asian faces greeted us blankly, and many arms reached out to us through the steel bars. I tried smiling at them, but gave up immediately, because I felt a fraud -- what did these people have to smile about, and what right did I have to waltz in there from the outside world and try to make them smile?

We had previously decided that we would concentrate our time and the food, soap and toothbrushes we'd brought on just the few Western prisoners, because otherwise where else do you start? In order to see if there were any white faces among the Asian ones, we had to go up close to the concrete walls and peer through the bars into the room on the other side. In the first room I looked into, I had begun to ask the painful question, "Are there any Westerners in here?" when I stopped short. The person next to me nudged me, and said, "Oh my goodness, look!" But I'd already seen. On the ground right in front of me was a woman in the final stages of giving birth to a baby boy, among almost two hundred prisoners squashed together in a room designed to accommodate forty to fifty-five.

I couldn't move. I stood there transfixed for maybe a minute before I realized that this woman and her newborn son did not need me standing there gawking in addition to the rest of her audience. I could feel my entire inner being moving somehow, bringing tears to my eyes. I quickly blocked the emotion and the image out of my mind, and tried to focus on something else -- anything else -- as I walked away, so as to cope with what I'd seen.

From then on, I was fine. I had put up my buffering barrier and nothing more could penetrate it. I continued my task of sweeping my eyes across the sea of pleading Asian eyes to find a pair of Western ones; finally dishing out bananas to the pushing children like a zoo feeder, and walking away from speaking with and grasping the hand of a German prisoner. Now, these things could only touch me superficially.

It was not until that evening when that gaping hole I thought I had successfully covered made itself known. I and another woman from our group broke down and cried together. I didn't know what I was crying for, who I was crying for. I just knew that there was this picture of this mother and her baby before my eyes, and that something inside me felt like it was bleeding.

Maybe it was because I'm also a female who will perhaps some day have children of my own, and seeing another woman in this same situation cut through the differences in skin color, language and circumstance that I could place between myself and the rest of the refugees. All those things that I hope for if ever I give birth -- privacy, dignity, a caring assuring partner, hygienic conditions, comfort -- this woman had **none** of these. Something which should be so special was reduced to the scene still before my eyes.

Later, one of our group who had also seen the birth, mentioned that though it had been shocking, it was in a way also beautiful. Someone else said to me that the idea had come to her that that baby could have been Jesus lying there having his umbilical cord cut in those conditions.

I must confess that, initially, neither of these thoughts came to me. I was too busy trying to cope with my own emotions, and being bitter about what kind of a world it was that this child was being born into... but I think they're right. Hope and life can shine from the most unlikely and impossible places!

"an eye-opener"

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to get my eyes opened, said one of the participants from Zimbabwe in a letter recently. - Now I have a lot of ideas!

The World Council of Churches' Youth Team and LWF Office for Youth in Church and Society organized an international HIV/AIDS workshop in Windhoek, Namibia, May 5-12. Twenty-seven young Christians, representing different regions and denominations gathered to share experiences of HIV/AIDS work in church settings, methods of education and human sexuality, as well as to get the newest information from the World Health Organization's AIDS program.

The outcome of the workshop is the brochure "*Why we care*" which you will find enclosed with this issue of *YOUTH* magazine. It will eventually be produced in five languages. The German and Portuguese versions will be ready in a few weeks time.

The brochure is produced by young people, for young people, to be used as an "awakener" or discussion-starter in church-related youth work. As you can see in the brochure, the participants explain why they care about people with HIV/AIDS by bringing testimonies on the situation in their country or region. They also state what is needed from churches and societies, e.g. removal of theological barriers to act on AIDS, courage from the churches to implement AIDS outreach programs, immediate material and emotional support for people living with HIV/AIDS, open dialogue with young people about human sexuality, and AIDS and sex education to be included in all youth programs.

This is the first time such global material has been produced where young Christians put their experiences into words and identify what is needed to make the churches a credible partner in the fight against HIV/AIDS. There are divided opinions about how to present issues related to HIV/AIDS in a church setting. You have to pick your way and use words pertinent to the context and culture. But we hope that "*Why we care*" will help you get started!

The workshop also produced a resource booklet which will be available in late 1993 with theological, anthropological and educational material. This booklet is to be used in denominational and ecumenical youth work worldwide.

The Lutheran participants from southern Africa formed a network for follow-up to the workshop and to continue the building up of knowledge and awareness of HIV/AIDS among youth workers in the churches. The network will initially be supported by the LWF Office for Youth in Church and Society. If you want to connect, write to our office!



"it is good for us to be here..."



WHAT?	Central and East European Youth Conference
WHERE?	Budapest, Hungary
TIME?	18-25 July 1993
THEME?	"It is good for us to be here..."
WHO?	80 participants + 20 Hungarian staff
PURPOSE?	to build bridges of understanding
PROGRAM?	4 days of conference 2 days of congregational visits a 1-day Christian music festival

What do you think happens when you bring together 100 young Europeans in Budapest - one of the old centers of Europe, in mid-summer? Imagine 100 different expectations, from twenty-three countries with nearly twenty-three languages. 100 life stories told in other languages than the mother tongue. It has to be chaotic, there have to be mixed feelings, it has to be challenging, inspiring, enlightening, difficult. And it was. Because we were present with our stories. We were confronted with Bible stories. And we wanted to be true. To our own stories and to the Bible stories. But it made sense, being forced together and confronted with ourselves and each other. And Christ was made visible in the caring community of believers, in washing each others' feet, in serving and sharing. We were together. Outside of the tent, in an exile, giving distance to our "ordinary" lives -- with an opportunity to analyze where we come from and how we might return. Changed.

What is the difference
between Christian and non-Christian?
Or is there any?

What Can the Church
Offer after Servitude?

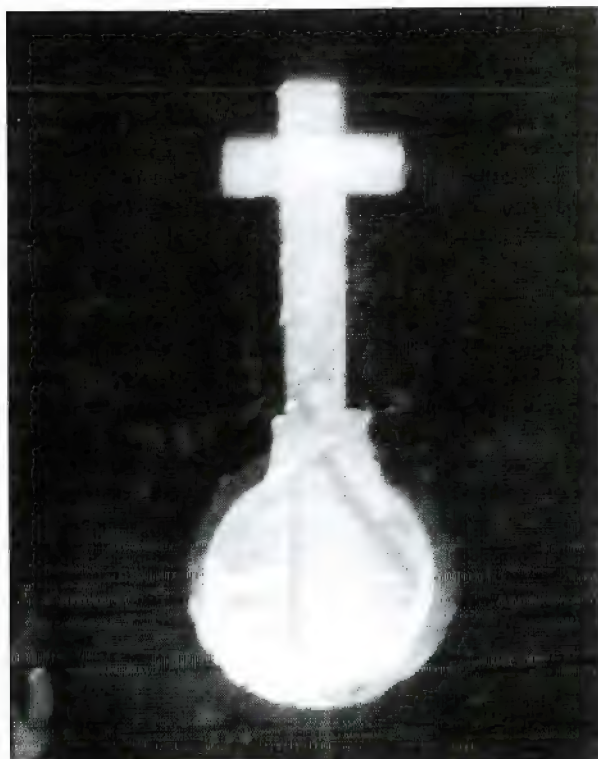
The New Age Session

Was bietet die Kirche
nach der Bedrückung?

LWF - A Communion also for Youth?

"herr, hier ist für uns gut zu sein" (matth. 17:4)

angela nitzsche, deutschland



mittel- und osteuropäische jugendkonferenz in budapest, ungar, vom 18. - 25. juli 1993

Diese Konferenz wurde in Zusammenarbeit mit dem Jugendsekretariat des LWB in Genf unter Leitung der derzeitigen Jugendreferentin Siv Limstrand und der ungarischen Jugendorganisation MEVISZ organisiert und durchgeführt. Der lutherische Jugendverband in Ungarn wurde 1988 nach einer halblegalen Vorbereitung unter dem Regime der Staatspartei gegründet. Dieser Verband findet seinen Platz in der Kirche inmitten politischer Veränderungen als eines der Fundamente der Jugendarbeit. Heute arbeiten die 450 Mitglieder in erster Linie in Teams, denen sie sich nach ihren Interessen und Fähigkeiten angeschlossen haben. Diese organisierten Zellen (Interessengruppen) erreichen durch ihre Programme, Camps und Veröffentlichungen mehrere tausend junge Menschen. Die Jugendlichen, die sich diesem Verband angeschlossen haben, sind zumeist solche, die "berührt" worden sind und die nach Wegen suchen, wie sie das, zu dem sie berufen wurden, mit ihren speziellen Talenten in der heutigen Situation verwirklichen können. Sie sind in Gottesdiensten und in missionarischen Tätigkeiten aktiv; eine Vorbereitung für die Mitgliedschaft in der Kirche als Erwachsene.

Ein Teil dieser jungen Menschen hat zum Gelingen der Jugendkonferenz beigetragen, und all den ungari-

schen Stewards und den Organisatoren sei herzlich gedankt.

Ein sich veränderndes Europa, ja ein neues Europa, war der Ausgangspunkt der Überlegungen zu dieser Konferenz. Zwei Fragen sollten in erster Linie bewegt werden: Wie können wir die neu entstandenen Grenzen in Europa überwinden, jetzt wo die alten doch erst gerade gefallen sind? Wie können wir jungen Menschen in der Kirche zu einem geeinigten Europa beitragen?

75 junge Christen aus 22 europäischen Ländern waren am Ende in Budapest zusammengekommen, um sich erstmalig in diesem Rahmen zu treffen und die wichtigen Fragen in ihrer Tiefe zu diskutieren. Wir wurden unterstützt durch die Bibelstudienleiter João Guilherme Biehl und Ivan Ferrero aus Brasilien.

Bekanntlich läßt sich mit ein wenig Abstand alles besser überschauen. Der Gipfel eines hohen Berges ist ein Platz für den besten Aus-, Rund- und Überblick und bietet die entsprechende Weit- und Fernsicht, sofern nicht Nebel und Wolken diese verhüllen.

Somit taten wir es Jesus und seinen Freunden gleich. "Und nach sechs Tagen nahm Jesus zu sich Petrus und Jakobus und Johannes, seinen Bruder, und ging mit ihnen allein auf einen hohen Berg. Und er ward verklart vor ihnen, und sein Angesicht leuchtete wie die Sonne, und seine Kleider wurden weiß wie das Licht. Und siehe da erschienen ihnen Mose und Elia; die redeten mit Ihm. Petrus aber hob an und sprach zu Jesus: Herr, hier ist für uns gut sein! Willst du, so wollen wir hier drei Hütten machen, dir eine, Mose eine und Elia eine" (Matth. 17:1-4).

Jeder von uns hat seine Realität verlassen. Ludmila und Jarmila als Vertreterinnen der slowakischen evang. Kirche in Jugoslawien verließen den Kriegsalltag und täglichen Kampf ums Überleben wegen des Embargos gegen Jugoslawien. Wir von der deutschen Delegation entflohen den massiven Problemen, die sich im Zuge der Wiedervereinigung oder des wachsenden Rechtsextremismus, der Ausländerfeindlichkeiten entwickelten. So kämpft jede Nation mehr oder minder mit ihren Schwierigkeiten, und dabei soll Europa auf dem Weg zu seiner Einheit sein.

Wir wollten diese Einheit ein Stück für uns erlebbar machen. Dazu mußten wir die Realität verlassen. Wir wollten sicher und geschützt sein. Zusammen sind wir auf den Berg gestiegen. Die ungarischen Stewards haben dazu ein schönes Bild entworfen - der Weg hinauf zum Berg mit den drei Zelten. Am Ende haben wir es auf unseren T-Shirts und Aufklebern mit nach Hause genommen.



Wir waren unter uns und fühlten uns mit der Zeit unbeobachtet. Anfangs mußten wir uns zwar aneinander gewöhnen, aber schnell bemerkten wir, daß uns keiner schief anschaut, wenn wir ausgelassen waren und die Bibel mit Leben füllten. Nicht jeder/jede konnte sich auf die lebendige und herausfordernde Bibelarbeit von João einlassen. Die slowakische Delegation verließ gleich nach dem ersten Tag die Konferenz, und hin und wieder hörte man kritische Bemerkungen am Rande, die dann konstruktiv mit in die Arbeit aufgenommen wurden, aber den meisten hat sie wohl geholfen.

Die Bibel ist unsere Lebensgeschichte. Wir leben in ihr, mit ihr, mit den Menschen in ihr, und wir müssen dafür sorgen, daß sie, daß wir lebendig bleiben. Nur dann sind wir veränderbar. Nur dann können wir die Welt verändern. Nur dann erwachen unsere Träume und Phantasien zu neuem Leben.

1. tag:

wir beschäftigten uns mit der fehlenden ordnung - "the lack of order"

Noch hielt uns die Realität gefangen, noch war sie in uns und um uns. Jeder hatte eine Tageszeitung aus seinem Land mitgebracht, und sie wurden alle an die Wände des Tagungsraumes geklebt. Wir formulierten Fragen zu unseren Realitäten - Was macht uns betroffen? Was wollen wir verändern? Was nimmt uns den Lebensmut? Als ein zweites Symbol brachte jeder einen Stein. Mit diesem Stein sollten wir das, was uns

lähmt, erschlagen. Das passierte noch recht verhalten. War die Realität noch zu nah? Hatten wir noch Angst, jemand könnte uns hören?

Wir suchten nach moralischen Werten und danach, welchen Beitrag wir als Christen leisten können, um diese Werte wieder als Alternative gegenüber der korrupten, manipulierten, ungerechten und beängstigenden Wirklichkeit setzen zu können.

2. tag:

uns bewegte das ausgeschlossensein - "exclusion"

In vielen Ländern Europas gibt es Minderheiten, die ständig auf der Suche nach der eigenen Identität sind. Weil sie anders sind als die Mehrheit, werden sie oft nicht integriert. Sie müssen sich immer wieder behaupten. Auch wir als Christen bilden eine Minderheit. In uns selbst gibt es eine Mehrheits- und eine Minderheitskirche.

Jessica aus Malaysia, derzeit in der Abteilung für Mission und Entwicklung des LWB in Genf, weiß da anderes aus ihrer Heimat zu berichten. Die Stämme, die sich vor Jahrhunderten bekriegt haben, leben nun friedlich unter dem Namen Jesu Christi beisammen. Zwar bildet auch dort die katholische Kirche eine Mehrheit, aber die Lutheraner fühlen sich keineswegs unterdrückt. Es gibt ein Komitee der katholischen und lutherischen Kirchen, in dem gemeinsam Kirchen- und Glaubensfragen diskutiert werden.

Uns Europäern fehlt oft das wahre Vertrauen in Gott und seine Schöpfung. Wir verlassen uns lieber auf uns selbst, und das läßt uns engstimmig werden. Wir verbringen viel Zeit damit, unsere Zukunft vorherzubestimmen und greifen all zu hart in Gottes Schöpfung ein.

3. tag: gleichgültigkeit - "indifference"

"Fürwahr, er trug unsere Krankheit und lud auf sich unsere Schmerzen. Wir aber hielten ihn für den, der geplagt und von Gott geschlagen und gemartert wäre. Aber er ist um unserer Missetat willen verwundet und um unserer Schuld willen zerschlagen. Die Strafe liegt auf ihm, auf dass wir Frieden hätten, und durch seine Wunden sind wir geheilt" (Jesaja 53:4-5).



Wir gehen sträflich miteinander und mit unserer Umwelt um! Wir brauchen einander, wir brauchen Gottes Schöpfung, um überleben und atmen zu können, aber wir nehmen uns selbst den Atem. Das wollen wir uns jedoch nicht eingestehen. So suchen wir nach dem schwächeren oder schwächsten Glied, um es - ihn/sie - für unsere Schuld verantwortlich zu machen. Pavel Pivonka hat das sehr schön in seinem Holzschnitt "Der Kreuzträger" illustriert. Wir lassen unser Kreuz tragen und erkennen nicht mal, daß es Jesus, daß er der Leidtragende ist.

Wollen wir uns und Gottes Welt eine Zukunft geben, wird es höchste Zeit, die Realität ernst zu nehmen und umzukehren zu den Ruinen unseres Lebens, um es neu zu gestalten. Nachdem wir am Tage zuvor aus unseren Körpern lebendige Statuen der leidenden und unterdrückten Kreatur schufen, gestalteten wir nun neue Gesichter - formten unsere Masken aus Gips.

"Wir gingen alle in die Irre wie Schafe, und ein jeder sah auf seinen Weg" (Jesaja 58:6). Das ist unsere Gleichgültigkeit. Aber wir sind nicht nur Lebewesen schlechthin. Gott hat uns geschaffen nach seinem

Bilde, "zum Bilde Gottes schuf er ihn", heißt es bei 1. Mose 1:27. Somit sind wir haftbar und verantwortlich für das, was wir tun. Als Gottes Geschöpfe sind wir veränderbar. Jesus gibt uns die Möglichkeit, mehr zu sein, als wir sind. Wir sind diejenigen, die in der Welt das Leid schaffen, aber wir haben auch die Möglichkeit, ein Teil des Leides auf uns zu nehmen, und das kann uns retten.

Die erste Schlacht hat Jesus für uns am Kreuz geschlagen. Die zweite Schlacht ist noch nicht ausgetragen. Es liegt bei uns, wie wir daran teilhaben.

4. tag: wir sind vom berg heruntergekommen - "we came down from the mountain"

Mit unseren Masken haben wir ein Stück Veränderbarkeit erlebbar gemacht. Wir wollen nicht länger unser wahres Gesicht verstecken. In unseren Realitäten müssen wir oft mit dem Strom schwimmen, um nicht anzuecken. Dabei verlieren wir unser eigenes Gesicht.

Am vierten Tag bekamen diese Masken Farben - Farben unseres Lebens, schreiend vor Schmerz und Qual, jubelnd vor Freude und Hoffnung, blaß wie Zweifel und Unsicherheit.

Gott kann Petrus' Gerede nicht mehr länger ertragen und "siehe eine Stimme aus der Wolke sprach: Dies ist mein lieber Sohn, an welchem ich Wohlgefallen habe; den sollt ihr hören!" (Matth. 17:5). Jesus ist unser Weg, Jesus ist unsere Offenbarung, unsere Hoffnung, unsere Zukunft. Auf ihn, auf seinen gemarterten Körper dürfen wir hören, müssen wir hören. Dazu brauchen wir keine Autoritäten. Es ist nicht genug zu reden. Wir müssen hören, um zu verstehen.

"GET UP AND DON'T BE AFRAID - Steht auf und traut Euch!" So ermunterte uns João aus Brasilien, bevor wir mit unseren Masken, mit Farben und unseren veränderten Körpern in einem Karnevalszug auf den Marktplatz hinter der theologischen Fakultät zogen.

João hatte uns am Montag auf den Berg geführt. Wir sind eine Gemeinschaft geworden. Aber es reicht nicht aus, unter uns zu bleiben, zu reden, zu diskutieren. Diese Konferenz war nicht dazu bestimmt, irgendeine Resolution zu verabschieden. Es war wichtiger hinabzusteigen, nach außen zu gehen, uns die Gemeinschaft für andere erlebbar zu machen, sich selbst in der Gemeinschaft und vor den anderen zu erleben und auszuprobieren. Nicht einmal der strömende Regen konnte uns davon abhalten. Für viele war das die schönste Erfahrung von Budapest.

Vier Tage waren wir beisammen auf dem Berg, wir haben zusammen gearbeitet und auf die Wirklichkeit hinabgeschaut. In den Workshops an den Nachmittagen wurden wir selber aktiv. Es bestand eine große

Auswahl, um das Aufeinanderhören auszuprobieren. Jeden Tag gab es einen Workshop unter dem Motto "Hören auf... Ex-Jugoslawien / die Balten / die Menschen aus dem Norden und die vereinigten Deutschen. Ein Großteil der anderen Workshops befaßte sich mit regionaler, globaler oder internationaler Jugendarbeit in den Kirchen - z.B. Umgang mit Aggressionen und Gewalt in der Jugendarbeit, den ich zu verantworten hatte.

Was passierte an den restlichen Tagen?

Am Freitag machten wir uns auf, um für zwei Tage die ungarische Realität kennenzulernen. Mehr als 10 Gruppen fuhren in alle Himmelsrichtungen, mehr oder weniger weit entfernt von Budapest, in lutherische Gemeinden bzw. in ein Jugendcamp.

Die Erfahrungen waren recht unterschiedlich und reichten von völliger Begeisterung bis zur Enttäuschung, Erwartungen wurden erfüllt oder auch nicht. Trotzdem lag das Kennenlernen auf beiden Seiten. Wir berichteten von unseren Heimatländern und -gemeinden und davon, was wir in den Tagen zuvor zusammen in Budapest gemacht hatten. Ich kann nun zumindestens einiges in andere Relationen setzen und war fasziniert, was die ungarische Jugend im Camp mit den einfachen und fast unzureichenden Mitteln auf die Beine stellte. Sie haben genauso viel Witz, Humor und Phantasie bei ihren Rollenspielen und bei ihrer Bibelarbeit. Und wo sonst in der Welt sitzt man schöner an einem Lagerfeuer als im ungarischen Land?

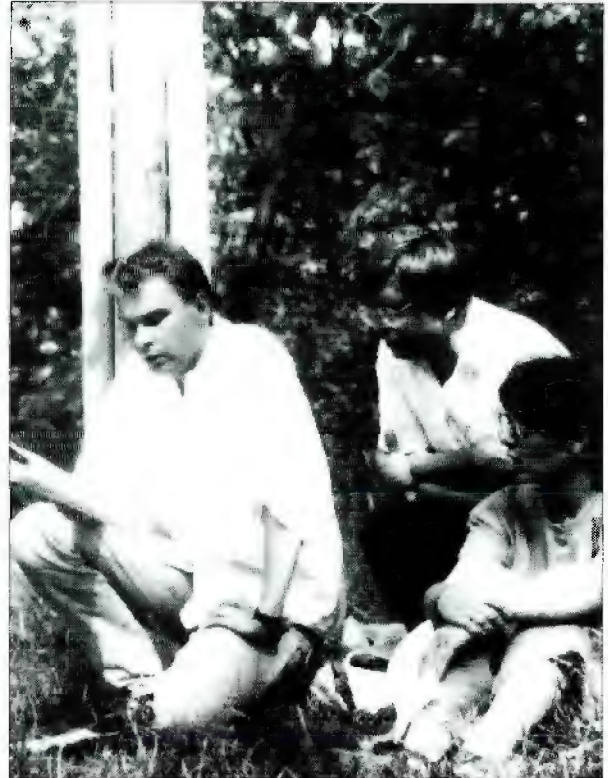
Jeder kehrte mit seinen Eindrücken und Erlebnissen am Samstag nach Budapest zurück. Es kam zu einem regen Austausch beim Abendessen und im Verlauf des Abends, an dem wir eine große Party feierten. Man spürte förmlich die Freude an der Musik, die natürlich ganz international war, an der Bewegung, am Tanz, am Ausdruck der Musik und an dem Miteinander. Es gibt wohl kaum etwas Schöneres, als in so einer Gemeinschaft seinen Geburtstag zu feiern, wie Siv es konnte.

Aber auch schon an den anderen Abenden ging es hoch her - es war eben eine Jugendkonferenz. Die ungarischen Stewards hatten sich da so manches für uns ausgedacht. Bei einem Ungarn-Quiz wurde gewetteifert und die Leute in der Stadt sollten uns auch kennenlernen, bei einem verrückten Budapestspiel. Nicht jeden Tag kommen junge Leute daher und fragen nach einer McDonald-Uniform, sprechen Touristen an, ob sie nicht Lust hätten, mit uns den Abend zu verbringen, holen sich Strafzettel von der Polizei usw. Wir taten all das und noch mehr, denn es ging um Punkte und um den Sieg, und wir hatten einfach einen Riesenspaß dabei.

Auf dem subkulturellen Abend war Raum und Möglichkeit, sich und sein Land auf unterschiedliche

Weise vorzustellen. Daß es dabei nicht immer ganz ernst zugeht, kann man sich sicher denken.

Schließlich war der letzte Tag angebrochen. Ein heißer Sommertag. Noch hatten wir mit der Müdigkeit und den Folgen der nächtlichen Party zu kämpfen, aber die Musik auf dem Musikfestival in Csömör nahe bei Budapest half uns, langsam wach zu werden. Wir wurden Zeugen eines wunderbaren Jona-Oratoriums von jungen Leuten inszeniert.



Abschlussgottesdienst

Somit waren wir dann fit für den Abschlußgottesdienst. Dazu stiegen wir nochmal auf einen Berg, diesmal im wahrsten Sinne des Wortes. Für mich war das eine faszinierende Stätte, die mich Golgatha erkennen ließ. Was wir die Woche über erlebt haben, was uns bewegt hatte, brachten wir auf den Altar - unsere Steine, die Masken, Gottes Wort in den verschiedenen Landessprachen usw. Das Band, das wir vor einer Woche miteinander geknüpft hatten, lag nun als bunter Ball vor uns, als Symbol der Verschiedenartigkeit unserer lutherischen Traditionen, die in Budapest vereinigt waren. Nun wurde das Knäuel wieder gelöst, jeder faßte das Band und löste die Knoten, so daß ein jeder seinem Nachbarn ein Stück unseres Bandes mit einem Segenswort geben konnte.

Konkrete Ergebnisse können wir am Ende nicht vorweisen, aber wenn ein jeder ein Stück der Budapest-Erfahrung mitnehmen konnte und vielleicht in seinem Land umsetzen kann, haben wir was erreicht.

the modern one

Interview with Rev. João Guilherme Biehl, Bible-study leader during the Central and East European Youth Conference in Budapest. Published in "The Tent," conference magazine.



The Tent: How do you work? How does what you do function?

João: I don't like this question because it obliges me to systematize somehow and it presupposes that I do have some sort of *a priori* strategy or system I apply to people, and that people are to react in such and such a way. So I'd rather say that I like to work with juxtaposition of texts, images and biographies, so what's more important to me is what kind of material I use. And I specially like to use poetic language because it creates a situation that each person can more or less define vis á vis his or her own imagination, how he or she wants to relate to that evocation. And I am pretty satisfied when people think responsibly. I think the ethical aim of my work is to make people think responsibly and creatively. And so far it has been successful. I think people have been suffering a lot in the Bible studies. And I distrust a knowledge which does not create disturbance, uneasiness and suffering.

There is not a masochistic element in it, but there is an element of realizing that when one mixes Bible, tradition, everyday life, and what everyone does not know about him- or herself, something unknown might come about. The beauty of it is the art that we make together, but it's definitely a painful experience, and a very enlightening one too. In short, I can say that we are exercising these days here in the Bible studies to be very modern in the sense that the modern subject is the one who dares to know and dares to reinvent him- or herself. So life becomes a piece of art.

The Tent: Thanks. Although you did not want to, you have answered my question, haven't you?

João: For example, now you ask me again in a way that I could easily say: "Yes, you are right. I've answered the question." But I don't know why you need me to say that your question was right.

The Tent: Where does the way you work come from?

João: Perhaps I will be very pragmatic now. I was invited to do this. I encountered Ivan, this Brazilian artist who lives in Berlin and is also working with architecture. And as soon as I got to know that they wanted me to do the Bible studies and that they wanted to work with a construction of the future, lack of order, and discuss all these questions in Europe regarding borders, immigration, otherness, and how I posit my identity now in the free democratic society that exists, when I got to know what the theme was, I thought it would be as creative as Ivan's, especially because Ivan works with garbage. He puts together leftovers, garbage, and makes something new out of them. I thought that would be our contribution, as coming from Brazil which is basically a country that creates everyday life out of garbage.

I remember Berlin in 1989 when I was traveling through Eastern Europe. I saw many people, besides looking at the shop windows like here in Hungary, many people all the time in front of shop windows and at the same time many, many people always opening up garbage cans, picking up life out of them. And I felt that it would be a good way to start to think on these Bible studies, to make our present coherent today by gathering up the ruins, the leftovers, the memories, the biographies, the fears, the paranoias, the terror, the wars, and then constructing, not a future, but constructing a place in which we can dwell today. So not to despise the present but...so that's a little bit of inspiration for the work.

The material is very important to me. I don't think it's enough to use the biblical texts. There are very important traditions that you carry. As Jews or Christians we more or less grow out of that literature, and now and then we make sense of it. But we also have other traditions which have been encouraged or banned or taken away from our imagination because maybe they are too subversive, they are too transgressive. So I like using stories, images and poems from subjects that are generally not taken into account as public. People who are not considered normal. A healthy work is a work which is normative, which sets the basic norms, which makes each one responsible for living a life which might have some happiness.

The Tent: You know that your work at this conference has met with some rather radical reactions.

João: I want to problematize your question. You have mentioned that many people had negative reactions or were disturbed. But what about the people who worked, who created, who came and said they got vitamins in their veins? What about the people who came to me and said that they could not speak but they had a stone in their chest, and so in these terms I don't like to answer your questions. But if you rephrase your question and ask how I feel regarded this way, I think it is more fair. This is a place where we can tell and exercise the truth, and I think it's always very dangerous and very risky, but the reward for it is that one keeps one's integrity and one learns something new.

tent = at home + on the way

eszter andorka

I would like to live in a tent - not in a sleeping bag at the railway station, with a rucksack under my head. And not in a flat locked up with a safety lock.

To believe in my work, to believe that it is exactly this that will change the lives of the people around me and in the wide world. But also to know that I cannot redeem individual persons, and indeed, they do not need it. (They are already redeemed).

To work for the creation of a community in which you can talk about your relationship with God freely, without inhibitions. But also to know that this is just a short time span, like a present.

To look for the person I belong to for a whole lifetime. But also to know that both he and I will be left alone at the most difficult moments.

To believe in everything I have experienced of God in and through our dialogues. But also to know that He is infinitely more than anything else.

To accept the fact that this is my life here, my only and unrepeatable life that only I can make happy or unhappy. But also to know that I belong to something else that is more than time.

seeking peace in the former yugoslavia



The Council of the Lutheran World Federation, which is the highest decision-making body of the LWF between assemblies, met in June in Kristiansand, Norway.

The council passed a resolution called "Resolution on seeking peace in the former Yugoslavia." The resolution expresses the deep-felt concern, anger and sorrow about the continued brutality against civilian communities in the former Yugoslavia. Torture, killing and raping of women cry out for response. The intention of the resolution is to respond in a responsible way to the critical situation in which civilians are being killed and violated indiscriminately. In the resolution the LWF Council tried to use ethical guidelines developed by the church in the course of its history that could be applied when political and military authorities have to decide on if, how, when and where military action might be considered.

In the critical examination of our confessional position concerning political responsibility and the use of military action, the following insights are fundamental:

- Military force can only be the last resort after all other means have been exhausted.
- The decision to take military action on humanitarian grounds can only be made by the

international community through a commonly accepted international authority. The decision-making process must be transparent and open.

- The use of military action must be limited, proportionate and defined in relation to the goal of the action, which can only be to protect lives, establish peace with justice and restore respect for human rights.
- Military action must have a reasonable chance of achieving its stated aims, so that it does not result in an intensification of hostilities.
- Military action cannot be a substitute for other means. It can only be part of a larger effort of humanitarian aid, economic support and the promotion of democratic structures following the conflict.

Participants in the Central and East European Youth Conference could not agree with this resolution and worked out an open letter to the LWF general secretary. The full text of the resolution is available from our office and will also be printed in the conference report. The resolution has a list of nine action items which it calls upon the LWF to execute.

open letter:
to the general secretary of the lwf,
dr. gunnar staalsett

The undersigned members and participants in the Central and East European Youth Conference of the Lutheran World Federation have read and understood the "Resolution on seeking peace in the former Yugoslavia."

As young Christians in Europe we feel called upon to state our position thereon.

For us, the statement that a "justified war" is possible is wrong. It cannot be that the suffering that is inevitably connected with every war is described as justified by our church.

To call on century-old traditions does not substitute a discussion on the issue and therefore cannot be used as argumentation. This is equally valid for traditions referring to Martin Luther.

We agree that conflicts have to be quelled before they escalate into open war. For us, one possibility to prevent military escalation is to abstain from the export of weapons.

The United Nations never can be free from the self-interest of powerful industrial nations. One must be aware of this when calling for their intervention. A military action within the framework of the United Nations will only occur if the national interests of the countries that have the greatest influence are threatened.

Up to now, before every war, the leaders have claimed that all peaceful means were exhausted.

Who after all, can decide that "all other means" are exhausted? Which facts can be decisive?

We fear that the theological classification between "justified" and "non-justified" war will lead to an inflation of "justified" wars.

In former Yugoslavia we see no "reasonable chance of achieving the stated aims [by military intervention]."

Even though there are a number of positive ideas in the resolution (and it has to be appreciated that the LWF has contributed to the discussion), we cannot, for the above-named reasons, support the paper, especially not the five "fundamental insights."

reply to open letter

This is to acknowledge receipt of the Open Letter from the LWF Central and East European Conference in Budapest.

I value the attention given by the consultation to this painful theological, moral and deeply human issue, but I feel that neither my concern in raising the issue nor the intention of the Council resolution may have been understood fully.

If they agree that conflicts have "to be quelled before they escalate into open war," then I think, there is a basis for discussing both the 'how' and 'when' of this position as well as the ethical issues implied.

Thank you for conveying the message to me.

Gunnar Staalsett
General Secretary



gathering for life and vision

report on the ecumenical global gathering of youth and students (eggys)

mendes, brazil, 10 - 26 july 1993

kristen stromberg, usa

Certainly the most striking aspect of EGGYS was the sheer size and energy of the meeting. Over 500 young people from around the world and many from Brazil itself filled the Marist Brothers' farm in Mendes. The large number of participants encouraged people to break up into smaller groups, either regionally or in terms of exposure program groups. In general, many people who went on exposure programs prior to the meeting felt that the meeting was rather long and somewhat disjointed -- almost as if it were two meetings, one right after the other. As could be expected, some were frustrated with organizational aspects of the meeting, which at times led to confusion and upset schedules. This was in part a result of the number of partners involved in the decision-making process, language and cultural differences, and certainly the very wide spectrum of background knowledge and expectations that each participant came with.

ambitious schedule

The schedule for the EGGYS meeting was very ambitious -- days were full of different forum, home-group, regional, organizational meetings and Bible studies/worship services, which kept people busy and creatively engaged most of the time. In spite of this, there were complaints that not much was actually getting **done** -- and that the output from the forums and the meeting as a whole was inadequate. I think this was due both to the frenetic schedule and the lack of time for reflection, and to the way in which before the meeting, the post-EGGYS process was envisioned as being as important as the gathering itself. This inevitably led to disappointment as what was supposed to arise organically from the meeting did not, in some cases, arise in the desired form.

1968 mindset?

The themes for the forums were chosen quite a while ago and were intended to express youth concerns and elicit vigorous debate. This being the case, there were complaints of lack of substantial discussion in the forums and suggestions that the participants weren't engaged enough. I do not think this was the case, for many delegates made considerable sacrifices to attend, and came full of energy and enthusiasm. Instead, it may have been that the themes weren't necessarily what people wanted to discuss. Despite the attractive model for the forums and the way in which they were all to relate to each other, this might not have been the most compelling for where youth are today. Issues

such as human sexuality, the pervasiveness of the capitalist system, and how youth could effect change vis à vis their own organizations and political systems came up very frequently in discussions, but were not adequately dealt with. One participant suggested that we were still using a 1968 mindset, but 1993 required a different approach.

clashed expectations

Related to this point is the deeper question of EGGYS' goals and the way in which certain expectations clashed at Mendes. On the one hand, EGGYS was meant to be the fruition of many local and regional processes that gave the meeting its strength and relevance. On the other hand, it was a huge international celebration, a one-time event that would spark an ecumenical youth movement for years to come. Sometimes the grass-roots movements were very new, and so people were frustrated that they didn't get more concrete output from EGGYS to help the local processes. Those who were excited at the prospect of such an international encounter were frustrated, however, with what at times became particularism and an attitude that local situations were so unique that wider discussions bordered on futility. In retrospect, I think it would have been wise to have started the meeting with somewhat more clearly defined goals and plans, even if the atmosphere of the meeting were to be a little less open -- it's hard to be spontaneous with over 500 people!

creativity and spontaneity

One of the things I enjoyed very much about the meeting was in fact the creativity and spontaneity that arose naturally at EGGYS, particularly in the regional *agoras* (cultural evenings), in the forums and liturgy. There were lively presentations of small group reports, drama presentations, songs, dances, etc. The *agoras* were often outstanding and were among the most well-attended and inspiring events. The Forum on Environment and Development led a march into the town of Mendes, with painted faces, to protest polluted water and to plant trees on the banks of the river. Almost all of the forums made very interesting presentations to the final plenary. In addition, the worship services were consistently challenging and engaging in non-traditional ways.

Much of the work of the meeting took place in small groups, which were generally extremely successful



Keynote speaker, Korean theologian, Chung Hyun Kyung (*right*) and delegate Mazen Bahady, Syria

and helped people to participate to the maximum. In spite of limited translation facilities, participants made a great effort to communicate, to understand, and to help others be heard across language barriers.

Another good arena for communication was the women's tent, set up in the middle of the compound, which was to serve as a space for women (though men were welcome) to meet, relax, get information and come for help with concerns such as sexual harassment. Although there was controversy over the fact that condoms were available in the tent, the women's tent was an important symbol in a meeting that had once pondered whether it was really necessary to have a women's forum.

The strong participation of Catholic youth was another very positive element of EGGYS. Delegates didn't always agree with one another, but the meeting didn't disintegrate into factions and benefited from the ex-

change of very different perspectives. The various Catholic partner organizations were well-organized and contributed a great deal.

leadership training

EGGYS provided a very valuable experience in leadership training for many participants. This was certainly true for me personally and for other coordinators who had been involved with the preparatory process, but also for those delegates drawn in to be small group leaders, Bible study leaders, home group facilitators, etc. This hands-on experience will surely be one of the important things participants have taken away from EGGYS and will put to use in their own contexts.

The regional cooperation that took place will also be an important legacy of EGGYS.

The *agoras* benefited from the good preparation and efforts of the different regions. Again, in spite of language and other barriers, most groups worked well together and drew up post-EGGYS commitments.

The North American group had a very good orientation meeting in New York just prior to EGGYS, and I am optimistic that this group will continue to work as a viable ecumenical network in the future.

networks for the future

That is finally what the most important outcome of EGGYS is -- the various networks that have sprung up from the meeting and will hopefully stay active long after. New networks have developed around organizational work, around forum issues, (Environment and Development, for example, has agreed to distribute a yearly newsletter/report among participants) and among friends. Many young people from EGGYS will become protagonists in ecumenical, church and activist work, and this meeting may have been a crucial catalyst for new forms of cooperation in the future.

Valuable Experiences

On a more personal note, the EGGYS experience has definitely taught me a great deal about working with other young people and about the process of planning such a meeting. As one of the coordinators for the Forum on Environment and Development, I found myself comparing the forum to the World Council of Churches (WCC) meeting related to the United Nations Conference for Environment and Development (UNCED), and of course the document falls short of that standard. On the other hand, the forum began with a great disparity of experience, and without any consensus on the outcome. It was interesting that many young people were extremely critical of UNCED, but were seldom as progressive as UNCED in terms of issues. For example, many people talked of preserving trees, preventing oil spills, and ozone depletion, but appeared to be less concerned about development, population, and racism as each of these interact with "environment."

difficult process

At times it was quite difficult to keep the process moving along smoothly. Of the more than fifteen people who were a part of our working group and met to develop the provocation paper in Manila, only five were at EGGYS, among other complications. Our forum was very popular, with over 100 people signed up, so to develop a program that interested people all the time was a challenge. The forum decided that they did not want to produce a long document, and wanted only to draw up a short pledge of commitments. The

drafting group turned in a report, but later the Steering Committee decided that this was inadequate and that they could not in good conscience take such a short report. I was quite dismayed that what was intended to be the fruit of an almost five-year process boiled down to one very late-night and necessarily exclusive drafting session. The document was not adequately discussed and many people felt disgruntled, or drafted alternative proposals when it was too late for presentation or translation at the meeting.

successful forum

Despite this, I think that Environment and Development was one of the most successful forums, and that people felt good about it. We had representatives from Greenpeace of Brazil and a Franciscan priest come to talk to the group. We staged a demonstration in Mendes, organized jointly with the local ecological group, planted trees, made certain personal commitments to the issues and made everyone at EGGYS write down a commitment on a piece of (recycled!) paper which was hung on a tree in the final plenary. We had very successful small group discussions, and agreed to keep in contact with these small groups in the future.

Most participants wanted to meet again soon, preferably as a smaller group, and most people focused on future possibilities rather than the shortcomings of EGGYS itself. It will be interesting to see how the annual newsletter comes together, for the editor was a very eager and optimistic participant from the West Bank. Again, I think the people at EGGYS were truly the most important element -- so many intelligent, creative young people who have already done so much and have much to offer. They made it all worthwhile!



LWF delegates

is there life after brazil?

The greatest mistake would be not to pay attention to the multifold initiatives that emerged before and at the Ecumenical Global Gathering of Youth and Students (EGGYS) itself, and whose realization will allow the process to expand and develop at local and regional levels. We would like to highlight some initiatives that look rather interesting and viable, and which were recommended by some forums at the gathering:

1. The observance of a worldwide "youth day of prayer and fasting" to be held once a year, with the relevant liturgical material jointly produced by EGGYS' partner organizations so that it can be used by all youth and student movements and associations. Specific issues pertaining to youth and students can be focused on for that day of prayer.
2. To create an annual bulletin on environmental and development issues, as part of the follow-up process to the EGGYS.
3. The creation of an "international ecumenical network of young women." It should consist of twelve to fifteen women active and knowledgeable about women's issues. It should specifically include women studying feminist/liberation theologies and women experienced in different areas of issues related to women, for example -- health, education, economics, etc. There should be at least one indigenous woman on the working group and a broad representation of regions and partner organizations.
4. The holding of leadership-training events for young women. The EGGYS inter-Regional Leadership Training Event for Young Women that was held in Jamaica is an excellent model for how such future events could be organized. These events should include practical skills training in many areas including how to conduct Bible study in a way that is liberating for women.
5. The creation of a women's newsletter which would focus on issues that are important to young women. It would be an important avenue to encourage young women writers and also a good place for young women theologians to dialogue. In addition, it would be a good tool to help educate men and older women about the issues of concern to us as young women.
6. The elaboration of an inclusive liturgy resource that incorporates inclusive language (language that is not gender-specific) that could be shared by all.
7. Post-EGGYS information should be disseminated by the various partner organizations to participants and youth and student movements and associations sharing: i) the outcome of the gathering; and ii) information on initiatives taking place at the local level of groups and national committees as a result of EGGYS-type cooperation.
8. The production of a directory to include information on EGGYS partner organizations' goals, programmatic thrusts and *foci*. This directory should also include information regarding the work they do ecumenically and interreligiously. The purpose of the directory will be to facilitate communication between organizations, exchange ideas and ensure that there not be unnecessary duplication of work. Youth organizations should exchange newsletters and other relevant periodicals that they publish.



ecumenical youth week

aggressions - dealing with aggressions - how am i affected by aggressions?

*report from the european ecumenical youth week
in rostock, germany, 25 july - 1 august, 1993*

angela nitzsche, germany

We tried to start where we left off last year, when we had the theme "Strange." As strangers, being treated as strangers, the violence against foreigners in German cities incited the Rostock Youth Association to make this year's theme: "Aggressions - Dealing with Aggressions - How am I affected by Aggressions."

Aggression appears more or less as a negative word in our minds. It sounds quite rude. Aggressive feelings like anger and rage are feelings we should better not talk about or act out. Normally they are kept inside. It is a sign of good behavior. Or, they manifest themselves in the form of violence.

One way: escape, submission, passivity, retreat and resignation. The other: fight, rebellion, violent revolt, direct retaliation and revenge.

We invited people from all over Europe, Christians and those of other confessions, to find the third way - J E S U S. "Take the moral initiative. Find a creative alternative against violence. Accept your own dignity of humankind. Answer brutal power with humor. Break the vicious circle of humiliation. Refuse to always take an inferior stand. Expose the injustice of the systems. Get the dynamic force of power under your control. Embarrass the oppressors till they turn back. Resist. See to it that the powerful people make decisions they were not prepared for. Be aware of your own strength. Be ready to suffer rather than give way. Make your oppressor see you in a new light. Take from oppressors every possibility of using violence. Be prepared to be punished for offenses against unjust laws. Overcome fear of the existing order and its rules."

The theme didn't get the expected full treatment mainly because of the following: the theme sounds deterrent, one must not talk about it, aggressions are treated as something immoral. Secondly, not everyone could understand nor interpret the contrasting pictures we proffered - a brutal skinhead, and Jesus crying over Jerusalem.

At least twenty-three people, from Poland, Denmark, Norway and Germany, together with nine staff persons met for one week to get to the bottom of the theme.



*And Jesus cried on Jerusalem!
(Rostock - Lichtenhagen, Mölln,
Solingen ...)*

On Sunday, July 25, we met in the Methodist church, St. Michaelis, for the opening worship and program.

We had to struggle with extensive language and communication problems as well as with tremendous age differences, because the information on the invitations was not taken that seriously.

Because of these problems we stayed mainly only on the surface of the theme. We talked mostly about aggressions -- When did people behave aggressively

toward me? When was I aggressive against others? How do I experience my aggressivity? Those talks could have been facilitated by a number of exercises. We were in a safe room, just the right place to try it out.

We had a look at the interesting aspects of Bible study. Two workshops dealt with two different texts from the New Testament - Jesus goes to the temple (Mark 11:15-19) and Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42). We worked the days from Monday till Friday. The texts are very short, and people were quite impressed that we had a whole week to deal with them. But the Bible is our own life story and therefore offers a lot of truth.

We looked for words connected with aggression, that might cause aggression. We took a closer look at people from different viewpoints and searched for similar situations in our own everyday lives. We tried to put all this into various role-plays or pantomimes. This was also the best way to overcome language problems.

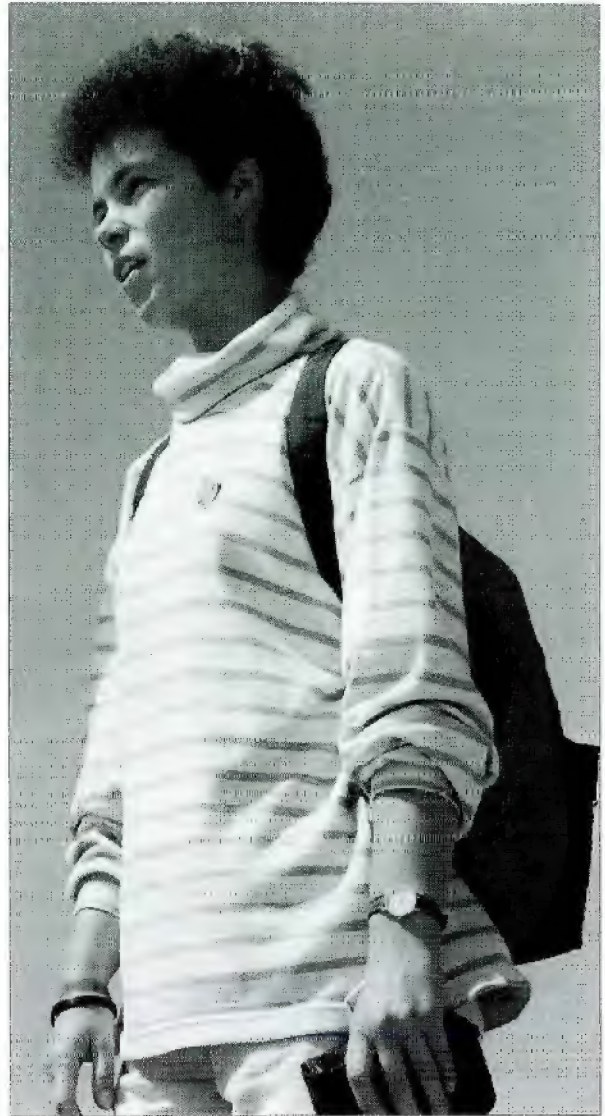
We tried to think of the word "aggression" with positive associations. Aggressivity might hurt others, we might be unjust while showing aggressivity, but it is an essential part of our life as well, to be used in a constructive way to find our place in God's plan for life. It is necessary not to think only of guilt, but of forgiveness as well. Otherwise innocence would become an ideal which leads to avoidance of conflicts. If we deal with aggressivity with the request from the Lord's Prayer: "Forgive us the wrongs that we have done." (Matthew 6:12), in relation to God, we may notice that the implication is the ability to take on one's guilt, not to praise the innocence.

We chose this topic for the closing service on the second Sunday. We followed the story of Jacob who struggled all his life till he had his last fight at Jabboc (1st Moses 32:23-33). Finally he found his place, received forgiveness and was blessed by the Lord.

We dealt with several viewpoints and the participants were satisfied and filled with new experiences. They liked the variety of methods used during the Bible study and were surprised by all the different aspects coming out of such short Bible texts.

We also had a lot of fun. After the workshops we met in the evening for dinner. Evening prayers followed, and then the evening program (folk dancing, games, party...). Friday is always the last evening and it has become a nice tradition to share a biblical meal together. Various items of food from the Bible are introduced by the different groups. People are always impressed by that meal because of the community experience.

Participants in the Rostock week also get the possibility to see at least a little bit of the town, coast and sur-



Angela Nitzsche

rounding areas. On our Saturday trip we followed in the tracks of the Northwest-Slavic tribes of the region in the ninth/tenth centuries at the open-air museum of Groß Raden. We enjoyed the lovely countryside of Mecklenburg, although rain was pouring down.

We would like to have a greater variety of participants from all over Europe. It is always challenging to see people come together across borders and confessions, experiencing their own personality together with strangers who become friends. A foreign country or a culture becomes more familiar when you know people from there.

It is really worthwhile to continue and keep this more than 30-year-old tradition and to fill it with new life and inspiration every year. We have already thought of a new theme for next year - "Reconciliation." A wish that touches everyone, in view of the conflicts and wars all over the world, and within Europe.

internships



Jessisca



The Nordic team of stewards at the 1993 LWF Council meeting

My name is Jessisca Aliah Umbukan. I come from Malaysia, the heart of South East Asia.

Last November I completed my theological studies at the Sabah Theological Seminary. Prior to coming to Geneva, I was working with my church, the Basel Christian Church of Malaysia, in the interior of the country. I enjoyed working with the Murut tribes for five and a half months - telling stories to the children, visiting the congregation, organizing educational trips with youth, preparing funeral services (scary!!) etc.

This is my fourth month as a youth intern in the Department for Mission and Development, with the Human Resources Development desk, supervised by Agneta Ucko. In this very short time I have been to Kristiansand for the Nordic Countries' Leadership Workshop and Stewards' Program during the LWF Council Meeting. This is my very first experience of meeting and working together with Nordic young people. I learned a lot from their way of thinking, their friendship and their own manner of politeness. Somehow, to be with them for seventeen days chased away all my fears, suspicion and feeling of being exclusive. I nearly forgot that I have black hair and dark brown eyes!

After Kristiansand I went to Budapest for the Central and East European Youth Conference. I met a lot of new friends from all over Europe and experienced their way of being Christian. From the discussions

and conversations with some of the theologians, I cannot help but ask myself why we are different in many ways but believe in the same Jesus Christ. This conference was more like an educational conference for me which widened my knowledge, but it left me feeling empty inside.

Back to Geneva again, I took a three-week French-language course at the University of Geneva - I guess it is easier for me to learn Chinese, maybe it would have been easier if I was a European. Sorry Siv, my French didn't work out.

This is my very first time being far away from home - living alone, and celebrating my birthday without my favorite food was really sad. Hopefully I will survive Christmas. Anyway it is teaching me to be more independent, responsible for others and myself, to be brave and tough too! How I miss the sunny and warm weather of Malaysia! I am proud to be a Malaysian Christian in many ways.

I still have five months to go and I wonder if in this very short time I will be able to be a blessing and a good witness for others in terms of my Asian Christian values? Can I be a fruitful church worker when I go back home? God knows what's best, and just like I trusted Siv to drive us safely through one tunnel after another until we arrived safely in Budapest - I have even more confidence in God.

"struggle to be the sun again"¹

This call and hope for Asian women from the Korean theologian Chung Hyun Kyung accompanied me as a kind of motto during my time at the headquarters of the Lutheran World Federation in Geneva. I had the opportunity to meet Chung during my first week when she was visiting here.

My name is Claudia Schreiber. I am a theologian from a very small church in Germany, the Church of Lippe. After finishing my theological studies at the university in Heidelberg, I wanted to gain some ecumenical experience before going to work as "Vikarin" (assistant minister) in a parish.

I was very happy that I could begin an internship with the Lutheran World Federation from last January on for a period of nine months. I worked in the Department for Mission and Development at the desk for Women in Church and Society (WICAS) with Dr. Msimbi Kanyoro and Ana Villanueva.

It was a very good and challenging time for me. After all the years of mainly theoretical study, it was a period of learning through personal encounter. Though the ecumenical center here in Geneva appears like a purely administrative building, it is full of life with all the people from different countries and continents. This international atmosphere is also reflected in the common worship service which every time is different, revealing rich Christian traditions.

During my first month I attended several NGO (non-governmental organization) meetings concerning human rights. In February, the Nobel Peace Prize winner Rigoberta Menchu came to the ecumenical center. This was a very exiting moment. It was good to see how many different organizations are involved in the movement for a better and just world and how women are engaged in the "struggle to be the sun again." During the women's gathering on March 8, "Women in the peace process: The difference women make" organized by the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) I met a lot of women who are very active in the peace movement. Their courage gave me new hope not to despair with the increasing violence in our world.

In the office, daily work consisted of a wide range of correspondence. While archiving nearly fifteen years of the WICAS' life, I got to know much about the work of the office over a long period of time and I was impressed by the various activities and many contacts the office has. I was especially involved in the program concerning eastern European women. I had several encounters with women from all over eastern and



central Europe, not only Lutheran but also Orthodox, Reformed and Catholic women. I got a different picture, compared to the mass media, of what is going on and of which are the points where women are specially affected. I was impressed by the deep faith and energy of these women struggling in their everyday life. In these difficult times, once again it is women who care for the family, work for the income and who are active in the life of the church.

While preparing for the Asian Women's Consultation which was held in Bangkok, I read some books about Asian feminist theology and was glad to have contact with people from Asia, especially with the other youth intern, Jessisca Umbukan from Malaysia. The consultation itself was the highlight of my time here. It was a good experience to meet women from all over Asia and to listen to their stories, especially as the situation of the minority churches is so different from the German context. I think that the young churches have a lot to contribute to the Christian faith and I hope that they find their own way of doing theology like, for example, Chung does. Somehow it was good not to complain about figures of membership as we often do in Germany, but to see that Christ is there where one or two gather in his name!

As now I am going back to Germany, I hope that I can keep in touch with the new friends I have made during this time and that I can share this inspiring experience with "my church" and encourage others to join the ecumenical family.

¹ Title comes from the poem "The Hidden Sun," written by a Japanese woman Hiratsuko Raicho. In her poem she claims that originally woman was the sun. She was an authentic person. But now woman is the moon. "Struggle to be the Sun again" - introducing Asian women's theology, by Chung Hyun Kyung, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York 1990.

news in brief

ESTONIA (lwi)

Estonia has granted operating licenses to eight private schools and colleges, including the theological institute of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church and the theological academy of Tartu university, the news service "Stamm's XSU Business" reported June 21. However, the ministry of culture and education advised that a license to operate does not mean immediate recognition by the state of the diplomas issued by those institutions of higher education.

SLOWAKEI (idl)

Bratislava -- Etwa 800 Jugendliche beteiligten sich am zweiten Jugendtreffen der evangelischen Jugend der Slowakei vom 1. bis 4. Juli in den Räumen der Safariks Universität in Kosice. Es stand unter dem Motto "Abhängig von Gott, nicht abhängig von der Welt". In zahlreichen Seminaren und Vorträgen wurden die Probleme junger Menschen debattiert, darunter Fragen über die Wahl des Lebenspartners, über Sexualität, über Beziehungen zwischen Eltern und Kindern, über neue östliche Religionen und Christentum und über die Rolle von Popmusik im Leben von Jugendlichen. An dem Treffen beteiligten sich auch Gäste aus den USA und Malaysia.

USA (lwi)

Chicago -- Lutheran Social Services (LSS) of Illinois is engaged in pioneering work recruiting adoptive families and guardians in Chicago for parents with the acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) who have no one to care for their children. The experimental Second Family program, which was begun earlier this year, also helps establish legal arrangements for families who choose a friend or relative on their own.

So far, Second Family has helped several parents who already had chosen adoptive families. The agency is

seeking new homes for about 40 children -- ranging in age from 2 to 15 years -- from more than a dozen other families, the Associated Press (AP) news agency reported in late August. In the process, the agency must negotiate complicated and sometimes controversial questions of race, sex and drug abuse. That's a new role for LSS, a child welfare agency set up during a cholera epidemic 125 years ago.

At least, 4,750 women in Chicago have the human immune deficiency virus (HIV) and more than 80 percent of them have at least one child, according to the Families' and Children's AIDS Network, a Chicago-based organization. Most of the women are single, black or Hispanic, and most of their 9,500 children are not thought to be infected with HIV.

USA (lwi)

New York -- The US aid agency Lutheran World Relief (LWR) approved a grant of US\$ 40,000 to provide emergency assistance for 40,000 children displaced by the fighting in southern Lebanon. Israel began military operations in Lebanese territory July 25. Seventy towns and villages in the Beqa'a Valley and south Lebanon were hit by land, sea and air attacks. Several refugee camps in the Saida, Tripoli and Tyre areas were also subjected to attacks.

Initially, 128 persons were reported killed and 460 wounded. Between 250,000 and 300,000 civilians, including 40,000 children, are estimated to be displaced to areas outside the immediate zones of conflict. Those unable to find temporary shelter with friends or relatives sought refuge in schools, mosques, monasteries and public or private buildings. The LWR's grant to the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) of Lebanon, which is playing a leading role with 13 other Lebanese agencies, will help provide emergency food, basic clothing and health care for the children uprooted by the fighting.

internships available in geneva for 1994

1. The LWF Office for Communication Services is seeking a youth intern who will assist in the production of the LWI and other information services. The candidate should have some training/experience in news-writing and in press work, fluency in English or German and must be under 30 years of age. The internship is for twelve months, beginning 1 January 1994.
2. The LWF Youth Office is seeking a female intern who will assist in the preparation of the Young Women's Leadership Training Seminar scheduled to take place in June 1994. The intern should be between 20-30 years of age, have finished basic university training (or be able to take a break in the middle of it) and be fluent in English.

The internship is for nine months, beginning 1 March 1994, or earlier.

Both interns should be able to adapt to an international environment, be realistic about what life in Geneva is about, and interested in working in a multicultural, ecumenical environment with lots of challenges at the personal, academic and spiritual levels.

For further information and to obtain an application form, please contact:

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publications available from the youth desk:

1. **HIV/AIDS Brochure**, produced by the HIV/AIDS Workshop in Windhoek, Namibia, May 1993 (jointly organized by WCC Youth Team and LWF Youth in Church and Society.)
- In English (German and French versions available soon, Spanish in preparation.)
2. Available from 1 December 1993:
Resource Booklet on HIV/AIDS
3. Copies of *YOUTH* magazine no. 34
4. "Let the Homeless Poor into your House" - Report from the European Lutheran Youth Consultation in Riga, Latvia, November 1992
- In English/German
5. **Report of the African Lutheran Youth Consultation in Limuru, Kenya, 21 - 25 April 1992**
- In English with some parts in French
6. "Youth Directory" LWF Member Churches, 1992
- In English
7. "Renewing Worship" a summarizing study based on activities 1985-90 - In English
8. **Report on the Pre-Assembly Youth Conference in Buenos Aires, Argentina, January 1991**
- In English, German and Spanish
9. "Wege die zum Frieden Führen" - Bericht über die Europäische Lutherische Jugendkonferenz in der CSFR, September/Oktober 1988
- auf Deutsch
10. "Lutheran Youth Confessing Christ in Asia" - Report on the Regional Asian Youth Gathering in Jerusalem, August 1987 - In English
11. "Young People on Peace and Justice"
- A Contribution to the International Youth Year 1985
- In English
12. **Report of the Pre-Assembly Youth Gathering, Budapest 1984** - In English

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events

upcoming / coming up / upcoming / coming up / upcoming / coming up / upcoming / coming up

october 1993

- 17-24** 25th Ecumenical Youth Council in Europe (EYCE) General Meeting will take place in Litomyšl, the Czech Republic. The theme is: "Youth in Transition - Building the Bridges."
- 29-31** Youth Committee Meeting of the German National Committee of the Lutheran World Federation in Berlin, Germany

november/december

- 12-14.11** National Youth Meeting (Ungdommens Kirkemöte) in Bergen, Norway
- 28.11-5.12** Youth Week and National Rally, Nigeria - national gathering for youth from all districts of the country. 10,000 participants expected.

pen pals

I am a boy of 18 years of age, and have completed secondary school and am now a student. I would like to have a pen pal from Switzerland because I like the country and want to know more about it. My hobbies are reading the Bible, youth fellowship and gospel music. My name and address are:

Abraham MENSAH
P.O. Box 0148
Takovedi, Ghana

I am looking forward to a pen pal from anywhere in the world except Africa. I am 17 years old. I love gospel music. I reply to letters in English. My name and address are:

Wisdom KAMWENDO
11592 Chitepo Street
Zengeza 4, P.O. Zengeza
Chitungwiza, Harare
Zimbabwe

I am looking forward to a pen pal from anywhere in the world. I am 17 years old and currently studying for an advanced certificate of education. My hobbies are: Camping (outdoor life), hot discussions on biblical issues, traveling. I reply to letters in English. My name and address are:

Brian BVORO
11103 Teurairopa Street
Zengeza 4, P.O. Zengeza
Chitungwiza, Harare
Zimbabwe

I am a 20-year-old student teacher from Zimbabwe. My hobbies are: reading novels, watching television, making friends, etc. I wish to have pen pals from anywhere in the world. I reply to letters in English. My name and address are:

Sydney MASHOKO
Stand no. 10989
Zengeza 4, P.O. Zengeza
Chitungwiza, Harare
Zimbabwe

Je suis âgé de 26 ans et de nationalité Algérienne. Je désire correspondre avec les jeunes gens (filles et garçons) d'Europe, notamment les Pays-Bas. J'aime le voyage, le sport, "art martial," la pêche et aussi la musique.

Sid-Ali KADACHE
Cité des 500 logts. Bt B26 No. II
42320 Zéralda
Algeria



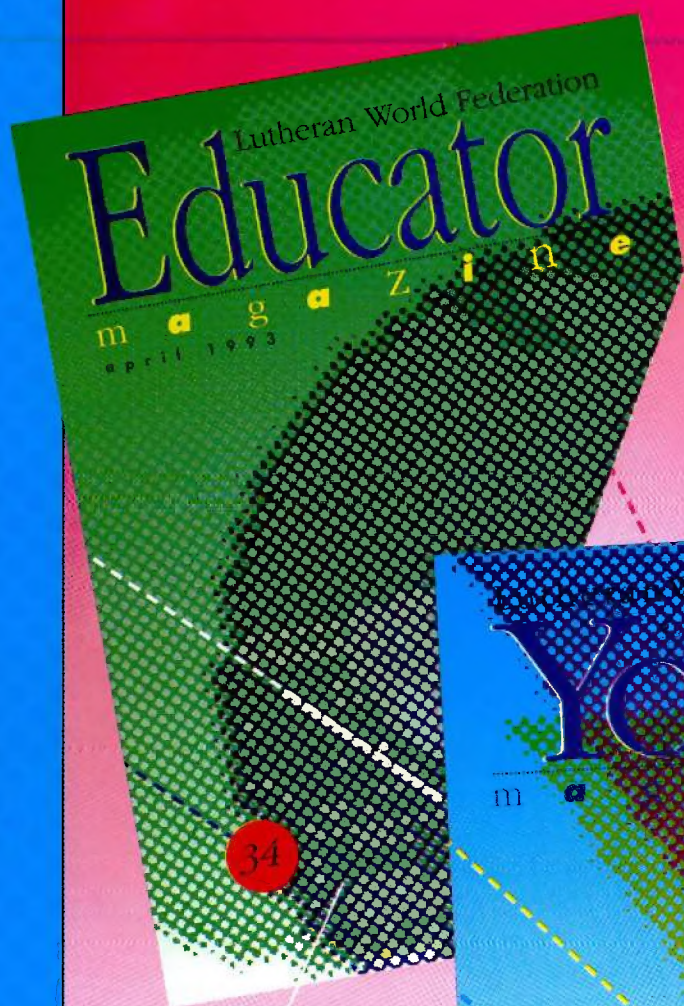
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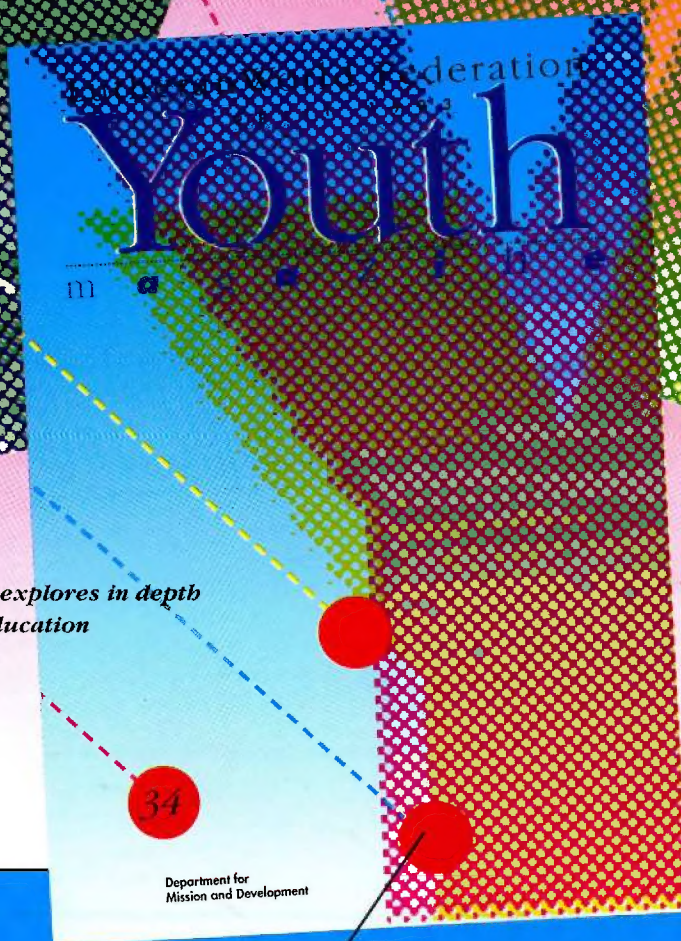
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